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W. A Shaw

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Y O U N G L O V E ;

A N O V E L.

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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Y O U N G L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

It would in truth have been impossible for Miss Thorwold to have returned either to the Mount, or to Crosby, under an aspect more calculated to produce the impression she desired, than that which she now assumed. To Alfred she appeared a mourning angel, coming to seek consolation in the tenderness of devoted love, for the heavy sorrow of bereaved friendship.

To his parents what could she seem, but the most beautiful young lady that ever lived,

who, notwithstanding her high birth and fashion, had given a most touching and decided proof that she really did love their matchless son as he deserved to be loved? Whilst even Mrs. Knight herself, notwithstanding a tolerably accurate previous knowledge of the young lady, now really did believe she had done her wrong in suspecting the sincerity of the feeling she had professed for her dying friend. She perfectly believed that she had been to Nice, and watched over her last moments, and certainly did not like her the worse, though she was a little surprised at it, for her having spent her uncle's fifty pound present in the trip.

She quite believed, too, and there she was not greatly wrong, that Lord William Hammond had at last done himself justice in the eyes of Amelia, and that having learned to judge him pretty accurately at his worth, she had been enabled at the same time to make a juster estimate than she had done before, of the value of Colonel Dermont's only and very handsome son, Alfred.

In short, every thing went on in the most happy and prosperous style imaginable towards rendering the petted heir happy in his own way, and there was only one moment at which any thing seemed to cast a shadow of doubt upon the perfect success of the plan laid by Miss Thorwold for her second espousals.

Colonel Dermont upon one occasion, when the time of his approaching happiness was made the subject of family discussion, ventured to say that he should rather prefer delaying the happy ceremony, till his son was of age.

The eager Alfred instantly exclaimed, "Oh, father!" in an accent of earnest remonstrance, but in the next moment, he felt, despite all the ardour of his love, that there was nothing unreasonable in this, Alfred notwithstanding all the spoiling process he had gone through, was always sufficiently generous to confess himself wrong, when he believed he was so, and now he was on the very verge of saying that perhaps his father was

right, when he caught a glance from the eye of Amelia, which rendered such a concession ten thousand times over impossible.

This glance was, in fact, a master-piece in its way, and probably could only have been inspired in such high perfection by the great importance of the object it had to obtain.

It *was* important for Miss Thorwold that she should be married again immediately, and oh ! how well her eyes pleaded for it ! No lips ever pronounced words more distinctly than her eyes now said, “ Can you, my Alfred—can you indeed endure this terrible delay ? ” and springing from his seat, as if all the self-willed impetuosity which had been so long nurtured in him, was just at that very moment ripened to perfection, he attacked the quickly-discomfited colonel with such a torrent of enamoured reasonings and passionate entreaties that the worthy gentleman shook his head as if he had been exposed to the pelting of a hail-storm ; but the moment he could recover his self-possession, he replied with his accustomed obedience to all the

darling boy's behests, "That Alfred should name the day himself."

"To-morrow then!" exclaimed the happy lover, bending his knee upon the foot-stool of Amelia, "to-morrow! oh, let it be to-morrow, sweetest."

And the look which the fair creature cast down upon him in return, was not at all likely to moderate the ardour with which he now seriously began to plead for the immediate solemnisation of the ceremony which was to make him the happiest of men.

"But, my dear love," said his mother, without a thought of contradicting him on any other grounds, "what will our dear Amelia do about her wedding-clothes?—she cannot be married in mourning, dearest, can she?"

"Nobody cares so little for dress as I do," said Amelia, in a gentle murmur. "When my heart is concerned I think of nothing else."

"Oh, let her wear the very same gown that I first saw her in!" exclaimed the enamoured youth. "And then let her give it to me to

keep for ever, and for ever, and for ever! And when I die let it lie upon my bosom, and be buried with me!"

Amelia smiled, and looked at Mrs. Dermont as if she expected that she would be so good as to answer for her.

"To be sure they are, both of them, as heartily in love, as ever two young creatures were," said Colonel Dermont, laughing. "However, though I don't mean to interfere at all about the dresses, and though I think my son Alfred quite right in not making any difficulties on that score, I must get you to remember, my dear children, that my Lord Ripley is not very likely to approve his niece's being married without settlements. You all know that his consent to the marriage has been given in the very handsomest manner possible, but that was when I proposed a proper settlement to be made upon you, by a rent charge on the estate, my dear. And I can't say I should like to write to him again now, to invite him to the wedding, with a P.S. purporting that I hope he will be so good

as not to mind there being no settlement at all, because there was no time for it. I don't think it would be pleasant to do that, Alfred, do you?"

"Could not the settlements be signed afterwards, sir?" said Alfred, looking again to the eyes of Amelia for sympathetic eagerness.

But now it happened that he could not catch her eye, for she was working him a pair of slippers, and appeared at that moment to be engaged on the most intricate part of the pattern. Alfred had therefore to fight for the postponed settlement alone; and for a little while he did it manfully. But at length his father assumed a graver air, and stopped short the flow of his eloquence by saying, "Are you aware, my dear Alfred, that in case you should die (and we are all liable to this, at any moment, you know), in case you should die between the time of your marriage, and that at which these parchments can be made ready, this lady will be left totally unprovided for? Are you aware of this?"

"No, certainly, I am not," replied Alfred.

“Neither can I be made aware of it now, father. Would not Amelia be left in your hands? And can I then have any fear of her being kindly treated?”

“I thank you, my son, for your confidence in me,” replied the colonel, with still increasing gravity. “But, believe me, on such a point it is your duty to trust to no man.” This tone effectually sobered Alfred, and he remained silent, though evidently very far from satisfied.

Nothing could be more sweetly graceful than the manner in which Amelia rose from her chair at this rather embarrassing moment, and gently approaching her intended father-in-law, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and said, “My dear, dear colonel! not for my sake let there be for a moment any coolness or misunderstanding between you and my dear Alfred. Forgive his opposition, forgive it for my sake! And let me make peace between you by coaxing him to withdraw it.”

And then, playfully gliding towards her lover, she bent her beautiful head upon his

shoulder, and said, "Dearest Alfred! say no more about it. Your dear father means nothing but kindness to us both. And besides, dear friend, you ought to remember that there is a great deal of difference between waiting till you are of age, which will not be, will it, for six dismal long months, and more, and only taking patience till the lawyers have finished their part of the business. Were I you, I really would not sit looking so very unhappy about it, but rouse myself up and write an eloquent epistle to these tedious gentlemen, imploring them, for charity, to make all the haste they can."

Alfred looked at her, of course, with rapture; and so indeed, did the colonel also, and even Mrs. Dermont laid aside some of the wedding-present wool-work she was engaged upon, for the pleasure of looking at her elegant daughter performing the part of peacemaker. Altogether they made a charming group.

And did Julia Drummond make one of it? Not exactly, because she was seated at the

farthest window, and had a book in her hand. Far better would it have been for her ease and comfort had she at that moment been really reading that book, instead of only pretending to do so. She might then have escaped all the disagreeable thoughts which rose, like so many imps, to torment her.

Why was it that she saw, what nobody else did? Were they all wrong, and she alone right in the interpretation of the little scene she had just witnessed? Or were they all right, and she alone wrong. Wrong from the hateful colouring which her secret feeling gave to every thing that passed before her?

This was a question as constantly asked by Julia of herself, and so uniformly left without any satisfactory answer, that it worried her out of all comfort; and at this moment she got so restless under it, that she got up and left the room.

Why did it seem so very evident to her that Amelia was quite as eager as Alfred could possibly be, for the hasty celebration of

their marriage, yet stopping short in her eagerness, exactly at the point at which her interest dictated that she should do so?

The manner in which this detestable question rose again and again before her, was tormenting beyond description, and having paced every walk in the wilderness, now fast, now slow, without encountering any thing of sufficient interest to stifle this odious train of thought, by suggesting a new one, she determined to set off upon a tolerably long walk, to pay a visit which she had been meditating for some days, without having quite sufficient energy of purpose to make it.

Julia was a kind-tempered, charitable little girl, and, considering the very little money of which she had the command, she really did a great deal of good in the neighbourhood. She put two children to school entirely at her own expense, and never received her quarterly allowance, which amounted exactly to seven pounds ten shillings, without setting aside one pound and the odd ten shillings for the purpose of buying something or other for

some of her poor neighbours, who wanted a great many things quite as much as she did herself.

Though this sum in itself was not sufficient to buy a great many golden opinions, the manner in which her little offerings were made, and the thoughtful, tidy, notable way in which she assisted with her own needle to increase the value of her little presents, had greatly endeared her to all the cottagers within the circle of her rambles, and it was to the dwelling of one of these that she was determined to turn her steps in the hope of finding something else to think of, besides the languishing glances of Miss Thorwold, and her skilful watchfulness about her own settlement.

Julia was at no great loss in which direction to turn her steps, for there was hardly a decent cottage in the parish of Stoke, where she was not a familiar visitant; and having called at one or two where there was nothing sufficiently interesting to tempt her to sit down, she turned aside from the broad parish road she had been following into a green

lane, which, though the autumn was far advanced, was still brightly green from the rich undergrowth of oak which bordered the copse through which it passed.

The cottage to which this led was that of a wood-cutter, whose perfectly sylvan residence might have satisfied Robin Hood himself, both from its seclusion and the woodland beauty of the scene which surrounded it. This pretty cottage was the property of the colonel and the bold forrester; or, in more modern phrase, the honest wood-cutter who inhabited it, was one of his yearly labourers. It had been a favourite resort both of Julia and Alfred, from the time they were old enough to walk so far unattended; for the good man always contrived to have the trunk of a tree nicely balanced as a see-saw for the young squire, and within the cottage there was a pretty little girl just two years older than Julia, who was never weary of inventing new sports for her, from the weaving a garland of daisies to the building a house with faggots.

By degrees this little woodland nymph had

grown into a great favourite with Miss Drummond, and having upon sundry occasions been permitted to join in a birthday festival of tea and cakes upon the lawn at the Mount, Mrs. Dermont herself took notice of her. She was then not only sent to school, but particular care was taken that she should be instructed in nice needle-work, so as to qualify her for an upper sort of servant's place when she grew up. The great ambition both of the parents and the little girl herself, very naturally, was that she should, in process of time, find service at the Mount; but accident was against her. About a year before she could be considered as old enough for the place, the upper-housemaid married, and her loss was supplied by a young woman whose conduct was too well approved to leave any hope of her being discharged to make room for another.

It this dilemma it came into the careful head of Mrs. Jenkins, the wood-cutter's wife, that Miss Drummond, now that the governess was gone, must be big enough to want a maid

of her own, and accordingly she presented herself one morning before the colonel and his lady, in order to mention, that if any such want existed, her daughter Susan, who was as good a girl as ever lived, &c. &c. &c., would be "ready and willing to take the place, and do all that in her lay to give satisfaction."

It was Mrs. Dermont who, when such applications were made in the library instead of the housekeeper's room, was, in ordinary cases, the person to reply ; but upon this occasion it was the colonel.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said he, "for interfering with what, in general, is certainly not my business, and I would not do it now if John Jenkins's wife were a person to get a simple 'yes,' or 'no,' when her eldest child was seeking service at the Mount. But I can't let that be, after John has been such a good and faithful servant for so many years; and therefore, my good Mrs. Jenkins, I will tell you myself the reason why it is quite impossible that your Susan should come here as

waiting-maid to Miss Drummond. The reason is, Mrs. Jenkins, that Miss Drummond cannot by any means have a waiting-maid just at present. I have very particular reasons of my own for saying this. I shall have no objection whatever, quite the contrary I am sure, if in two years from the present time, Miss Drummond, who will then be seventeen, and her own mistress, should like to take your daughter Susan for her personal attendant, but till then, Mrs. Dermont means to be so kind as to go on as she has always done, letting her own maid do all that is wanted for the young lady."

This was said with great kindness, and indeed with a flattering air of confidential familiarity. Nevertheless, little Julia, who was present, saw that the good woman's eyes filled with tears, and that though she courtesied low, and thanked his honour for all his goodness to her and hers, she was deeply disappointed.

Julia herself might have been deeply disappointed too, had any such grand idea as

having a maid of her own, ever entered her head. But now as far as she was herself concerned, she could only rejoice at the idea that such dignity was in store for her for the future, and as she gave the disappointed petitioner a friendly farewell nod, she promised her in her heart, that if indeed, the day should come when she herself should have such patronage to bestow, Susan Jenkins should be the object of it, and no other.

And Julia failed not to say this to Susan herself at the very first opportunity, and the assurance was received with as much gratitude as if the promised benefit was to be bestowed immediately. But poor Susan could not wait for it without doing something to maintain herself in the interval. For John Jenkins and his good wife had a very numerous progeny, and Susan being rather more fit than most girls of seventeen to go into service, could not of course waste her time by remaining at home. So, after spending a month or two in vainly seeking a place in the neighbourhood, the poor girl had been at

length consigned to an aunt in London, who consented to undertake the task of finding a place for her.

A girl brought up as Susan had been, in the country, was not very likely to find herself comfortable in any first experiment of a London service, and the consequence was, that she had changed her place, greatly to her parents' dissatisfaction, more than once.

Julia had never omitted to make inquiries about her, and to send such friendly messages from time to time, as sufficed to keep up their youthful feelings of mutual attachment; and it was to make her usual inquiry for this young woman, that Julia bent her steps towards the copse. Having passed the lane, and entered upon the pretty bit of cleared ground at the end of it, the first object which met her eye was her old friend Susan herself, carrying one little sister in her arms, and having two others hanging upon her apron. The poor girl was looking, as she always did, exceedingly neat, but she was pale, thin, and sadly out of spirits.

When the first greetings were over, and Susan's astonishment at the growth and improved appearance of the young lady, all of which was quite genuine, duly expressed, the eldest of her two attendant sisters was intrusted with the task of carrying the baby into the house, and the other dismissed with the words, "Go to mother, dear, that's a good girl," and then the poor girl pointed to the trunk of a tree, which occupied the spot formerly sacred to the see-saw, and asked Julia if she would "condescend to sit down there and rest herself?"

"Willingly, Susan, if you will come and sit beside me," replied the young lady; "but I should like to return some of the fine compliments you have been making me, if I could; but I really cannot. You don't look well at all. What is the matter with you, Susan?"

"Nothing, I believe, Miss Julia; nothing that I know of is the matter with me in the way of health; and, if I look ill, it is only because I have been fretting. Oh, Miss

Julia, I am so afraid that father and mother blame me for leaving my place, and coming straight home again without waiting in that wicked London any longer to look for a new one. I would rather get my living by working in the fields a hundred thousand times over, Miss Julia, than remain there to see and hear what I have seen and heard."

"But, surely, Susan, if you have been unlucky enough to fall into the company of bad people, your parents cannot blame you for coming away?"

"They don't blame me, Miss Julia, for leaving the bad people, but they say, poor souls, that they have neither house-room nor meat either to spare, and therefore it would have been better for us all, if, when I left my place, I had stopped to look out for another, instead of coming down home at once."

"Why there does seem sense in that, Susan," replied Julia, gently, "unless you had some particular reason for wanting to leave London altogether."

"I had no other reason but the hating it,

Miss Julia, and perhaps I might not have thought it right to listen to that if—”

“If what, Susan?”

“Why if it had not been so very near to the time of your being seventeen, Miss Julia.”

Julia coloured, but she smiled too.

“Do you remember that, Susan? I remember it quite well, too. My birthday is in November, and we have got to the middle of October already.”

“And, if the colonel was to keep in the same mind, Miss Julia, do you think you could put up with a maid to tend upon you who has had so little practice, for I have never had a lady’s-maid’s place yet? That place that I came from last, and which was too wicked for me to think of without terror and shame too: in that place, for the matter of a week or two I was the only maid that a beautiful lady that lodged there had to wait upon her; and again and again, Miss Julia, when I was brushing her beautiful long hair,

I used to please myself by thinking that it was good practice for me against coming to wait upon you."

"Oh, if that were all the difficulty, Susan," replied Julia, laughing, "I dare say we should get on very well, for I generally dress myself almost entirely. But my guardian has never said a word to me since about having a maid of my own, so I can't feel quite certain that he was in earnest; but I hope, Susan, that your mother is not really angry with you for coming home; is she?"

"Oh dear no, Miss Julia. Mother is a great deal too kind and good for that; and so is father too. But they seem to think that I was in too great a hurry; but indeed I was not; and I only wish I had not stayed quite so long, for I hate to think of such wickedness."

"Was the beautiful young lady you waited upon, one of the wicked people, Susan?"

"She was not a young lady all the time,"

replied the girl, "for she was married while I was in the house."

"But was she one of the wicked people, Susan?" said Julia.

"No, Miss Julia, I hope not. I did not like her very much, certainly, because she was cross and fretful-like, and hard to please, but I don't know any thing very bad of her, and, if I am not greatly mistaken, she has been sadly deceived already by them that ought to have been ashamed of themselves for their base conduct. But you must not even ask me to talk about these dreadful people, Miss Julia, for it is next to impossible I could do so without saying what it is not fit that you should hear. Oh! if I can but come to live with you, Miss Julia, I shall forget it all, and grow again to be as innocent a girl as ever I was; but I do not believe that any girl can be sent to London as I was, to get a place wherever I happened to find one, without seeing and hearing more than is good for them. Will you be so very kind as to ask the colonel about it, Miss Julia?"

“You may depend upon it I shall not forget it, my dear Susan, and you shall hear from me as soon as I have got his answer,” was Julia’s hopeful reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE visit of Julia to her old friend Susan had, in some degree, produced the desired effect—that is to say, Julia on her way home did disengage her thoughts *in some degree* from the subject which so painfully and uselessly engrossed them, leading her to give not above nine minutes out of every ten to meditation on the approaching marriage of Alfred, while, during the remainder of the time she was thinking of poor Susan, and turning in her mind the best and least presumptuous way of recalling her and her wishes, to the memory of her guardian and Mrs. Dermont.

The sight of the house, however, and the

recollection of all that was going on within it; the vague but strong persuasion which possessed her, that Miss Thorwold felt no real attachment to Alfred, and that he, with all his noble qualities, his generous and confiding nature, and his devoted love, was about to chain himself for life to a woman who married him only for the sake of his estate—all rushed back upon her heart with a feeling of renewed misery, and a sigh that she would willingly have permitted to carry her life with it, burst from her bosom.

“Oh! were it but possible that I could help him,” thought she; “but there, there is the misery. It is *impossible*!”

On entering the drawing-room she found Miss Thorwold surrounded by the colonel, his lady, and Alfred. She was sitting near a writing-table, with an open note in her hand, while the trio above-mentioned were evidently in the act of holding counsel with her on the contents of it.

“Oh! here is our dear Julia!” exclaimed Alfred; “she must help to persuade you, my

Amelia, not to commit the cruelty of running away from us at a moment when your presence is so necessary to enable me to bear patiently the torturing delay of the lawyers. Mrs. Knight wants to take her away from us, Julia! Tell her that it is her duty to stay."

Amelia had, immediately on her return to the Mount, apologised in the most penitent style to Julia for the little warmth of temper which she had shown at a moment when her mind was harassed by doubts whether her ambitious uncle, Lord Ripley, would sanction the attachment she had formed. This apology, and all the coaxing series of civilities which had followed, increased the discomfort of Julia in no small degree; but there was no help for it, and she had to submit to a vast deal of seeming affection, and even to occasional caresses, which greatly added to the sum of her daily suffering.

"Let me state the case," said the affianced bride of poor Alfred. "I will not suffer our dear Julia to be prejudiced. Here is a letter

from Mrs. Knight, Miss Drummond, inviting me to return to Crosby. Ought I to refuse or accept it?" And as she spoke, she playfully pressed a stick of sealing-wax upon the lips of Alfred, in token that he was not to speak.

Well, full well did the wily Amelia know that Julia would rather sink at her feet than raise her voice to counsel her departure. Well did she know that the poor girl loved her former playfellow with a tenderness that she would die rather than reveal, and a perfection of devotion which would make her endure any martyrdom, rather than give him pain. Safely, therefore, did she refer to her a question, the answer to which she felt to be of immense importance to her in her terribly critical situation, although she knew that the answer she wished for was, in every way, precisely what it would be most painful to her to give.

"Think how long I have been away from this dear old friend! Must I yield to all this dear flattering importunity? or must I per-

form the stern commands of duty, and run away? Tell me, Julia?" said she.

Julia coloured a little at this reference, and the more because she felt that the eye of Alfred was upon her. She replied, however, without any outward symptom of discomposure,

"We cannot but suppose, Miss Thorwold, that your friend, Mrs. Knight, would be the first to insist upon a negative to her own request, did she know that you could only be led to her by the stern commands of duty."

This answer caused Alfred to knit his brows—but they were instantly smoothed again by Miss Thorwold's saying with clever readiness,

"Oh! how well you know her, my dear Julia! She would indeed! I was determined that you should decide the point, and you have done it. Dear, kind Mrs. Knight! She would never forgive me did she know that I could for a moment fancy she could wish me to come to her, under such circumstances. Ah! dearest Mrs. Dermont! she knows not

as yet how completely you have made me your thrall ! Now then for my answer. I shall no longer find it difficult !”

And the fair creature, looking up at poor Julia with a smile of blended *naïveté* and sweetness, drew the writing materials towards her, and set about telling her dear Mrs. Knight that to leave the Mount at this moment was impossible.

Great, indeed, was the averseness of Amelia at this moment to the idea of any prolonged tête-à-tête with her confidential and acute friend Mrs. Knight. It was not quite impossible, indeed, that she might have told her ALL, without encountering any very severe opposition to her present plans—and Amelia was very capable of guessing this. Nevertheless, she greatly preferred burying *that all*, or as much of it as possible, in perpetual oblivion, and the carefully avoiding all security on the part of Mrs. Knight, was just now the most obvious way of effecting this.

“ And here are more letters, Julia !” said

Mrs. Dermont, who now that she was relieved from all dread of seeing her son dying of a broken heart, remembered that there was one addressed to herself, which she had laid unopened upon the table.

“Here is one to you and one to me, my dear, from Mrs. Stephens; so let us see what they are about, for the servant is waiting.”

Julia guessed the purport of her note before she opened it.

From the time Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had met the party assembled for the pleasure of poor Alfred at the Mount, their ideas of their own consequence in the county had very considerably increased. Mrs. Knight was almost the only lady in the neighbourhood who had a winter residence in London; and this circumstance, together with her frequently receiving titled guests, and wearing moreover a greater variety of new bonnets than any body else in the whole county, gave her a pre-eminence in the estimation of most of her acquaintance, which rendered the being invited to stay in

the house with her, a very flattering compliment indeed.

Neither was it possible that such highly intelligent people as Mr. and Mrs. Stephens could remain ignorant of the high and long-descended consideration in which Mrs. Verepoint and her young heiress were held; and the meeting this young lady, under circumstances leading to such familiar intercourse, was very nearly equally agreeable. As to Mr. Marsh, too, and his charming sister, if his mental superiority, and her ingratiating vivacity, had not, respectively, brought their own recommendation, the seeing them selected to make part of such a peculiarly select and distinguished society, was quite enough to prove that it was no bad compliment to be invited to meet them.

In short, from the period of this "gathering" at the Mount, Mr. Stephens and his lady had often laid aside some of their transatlantic, philosophical, unitarian lucubrations, for the purpose of discussing the best way of

keeping up an intimate intercourse with their most distinguished county neighbours.

“Mrs. Knight and her set—the Verepoints, the Marshes, the Dermonts, and ourselves, Liebe,” said Mrs. Stephens, at the close of one of those interesting conversations, “are evidently the knot that ought to keep together, and become more closely united with every passing year.”

It was not in the nature of Mr. Stephens to differ from his Arabella on any point on which she had decidedly expressed an opinion—and if she had thought proper to include her majesty the Queen in the set that ought to hang particularly together, having themselves for its centre, he would never have uttered a dissentient word.

Since the *al fresco* fête at the Mount, and the one which quickly followed it at Crosby, Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had both, in their respective hearts, abandoned the notion of giving any thing of the same kind in their grounds at Beech Hill ; but they had

said nothing about it even to each other, the subject had been permitted to drop, and there was an end of it. Not the less, however, were they both determined to do something. The change in the Overby garrison, and the startling rank of three of the newly-arrived officers, made it especially necessary that this something should be in first-rate style, but the what, and the how, kept them long in suspense. At one time they thought of a dance in their newly-decorated dining-room, with tea and cards in the drawing-room, refreshments, such as lemonade, negus, and cakes, in the footman's pantry, and a standing supper in the two best bed-rooms. But an accurate measurement of the premises, led at last, to the abandonment of the scheme, for which Mrs. Stephens apologised to her friend Celestina, who had been driven half wild with joy at the idea of such an opportunity of being introduced to all the new officers at once, by saying that she felt that in her situation she owed it to herself, and to what was more, infinitely more precious still, not

to over-exert herself. Seeing, however, the look of dreadful agony with which her charming young friend received this announcement, and fearing that her feelings might bring on one of the terrible nervous attacks to which she was subject, she began in a most amiable manner to descant upon the superior advantages likely to arise from a plan of proceedings which, though it excluded the ball, and the pleasant standing supper in the bedrooms, was likely to lead to the most important and beneficial results.

“It was on your account entirely, my dear, that I wished to give this ball, as I well know the delight of a dance to a young girl like you, Celestina. A delight, by the way, which, I promise you, we young married women can share when we have no conscientious reasons to check us. But ah, my dear Celestina! after all there is no happiness that can be compared to that given and received by conjugal love! It is on this, my dear, that your young heart should fix itself. It is to this

that all your wishes, all your endeavours should tend and concentrate themselves."

If it were the object of Mrs. Stephens to save her fair friend from a fainting fit, by the thrilling effect of these electric words, she showed great judgment, for every symptom of the kind vanished immediately; it is highly probable that she might anticipate this; but nevertheless, she was a good deal startled by the indignant burst which followed.

"And don't I fix my heart on it, Mrs. Stephens? Heavens and earth! What can you mean by saying that in the way of a reproof? Do I deserve it, Mrs. Stephens? Don't all my wishes and all my endeavours tend to that?"

And here a violent burst of tears, which seemed to avenge the lost ball and the unjust reproaches all in one, came to her relief, nor did her sobbings cease, till Mrs. Stephens hinted plainly, that she feared the sight of such vehement agitation might produce the

most dangerous effects ,upon herself, and that if her beloved Celestina could not compose herself, it would be better for both their sakes that they should part. And now again, the eloquence of Mrs. Stephens was effectual; for Celestina would rather have been reproached from morning to night for not being sufficiently anxious to marry, than have left Beech Hill for Locklow Wood. For not only had she a sympathising friend at Beech Hill to whom she could open her heart, and a good many more nice things to eat, but if nobody else came in her way, she did contrive now and then to get something like a little flirtation from Mr. Stephens, who very often, if his lady was not in presence, would testify his kind feelings to her friend, by sundry little gallantries, which escaped him, as it were, by the mere force of habit, whereas at Locklow Wood, the only variety she had from seeing her brother read from morning till night, was by receiving from him in the most provoking manner every species of kindness and attention, *except* that of bringing

officers, or even a stray curate, now and then home to dine with them, which was, in fact, the only species of attention which she had the least pleasure in receiving from him. Affectionate, calm, and even pleasant feelings being thus restored between the two ladies, they fell to talking of the pleasantest style of county visiting, and Mrs. Stephens charmed the heart of her young friend, by saying,

“In fact, my dear, Mrs. Knight’s set, the Verepoints, the Dermonts, you and your brother, and ourselves, ought to make common cause, and contrive, in one way or another, to do something pleasant and amusing, every month of the year.”

“What a divine woman you are!” exclaimed Celestina, warmly, cordially, sincerely, and with her grateful soul beaming from her eyes. “Certainly if there is any condition upon earth which may fairly be said to resemble what religion teaches us to believe of Heaven, it is that of a young married woman like you, scattering happiness

far and near, in every direction ! I do think you are more than half an angel already !”

Mrs. Stephens was touched. It was exactly her own idea.

“Charmingly expressed, my dear girl,” said she, bending towards her, and impressing a kiss upon her forehead, “and may this fate be speedily your own, my dear.”

From this time forward the second thought of Mrs. Stephens—her husband and her little work together naturally constituting her first—was how to make Beech Hill celebrated for its agreeable influence upon the county.

To lodge as many persons, male and female, in it as Mrs. Dermont had done at the Mount was impossible, and the idle thought was dismissed as soon as conceived. But there were various ways of making a house agreeable, even when it does not happen to have so many bed-rooms as the Mount—to have young ladies in the house, and to cultivate an easy sort of intimacy with all the gentlemen out of it, appeared to her as the best device that could be hit upon, and it was in

consequence of this notion that, having before hinted to Julia the having formed the intention of favouring her with an invitation, she now sent it, and it was to this invitation that the attention of Miss Drummond was at present called. The time had been, and not very many months ago, when such a proposal as that of going to spend a "week or ten days" with Mrs. Stephens would have appeared to her as one absolutely impossible to accept, "on account of its being so *very* disagreeable." For then, every day in which Alfred had not shared in her readings, her walkings, and her talkings, would have been a day from which all joy and gladness would seem to have been excluded. But now the case was different, and the idea of getting away appeared like a release from suffering.

"Well, my dear, what do you say to this invitation? It is abundantly civil, certainly."

And Mrs. Dermont looked as if she thought Beech Hill had taken a startling liberty with the Mount.

“If you have no objection, ma’am,” replied Julia, “I should like to go.”

“No, if you wish it, Julia, I certainly do not see any particular objection. It is meant, I suppose, as a return for our asking them here. It is from Beech Hill, colonel, asking Julia to stay there for a week or ten days. Do you see any objection, as she seems to like it?”

“Oh! I am so glad you like that Mrs. Stephens, my dear Julia!” exclaimed Miss Thorwold, before the deliberating colonel could find time to reply. “There is a great deal of talent about her, and I should greatly like to see more of her. I think you are so right for wishing to go.”

These words were well timed, and well calculated to produce the effect intended by the lovely speaker. Next to her nervously eager wish for the earliest possible celebration of the marriage ceremony between herself and Alfred, Amelia’s most earnest desire at that time was to get rid of Julia. There was something in the meditative depth of her

dark eye which harassed her, she knew not why. It was not that she could fear one so very nearly a child; that was impossible; and she knew, oh! she well knew, that one word from herself, breathed into the ear of Alfred would suffice to overthrow and obliterate all and every thing little Julia Drummond could say to him; even could the love-lorn little soul take courage and talk to him from morning to night, a contingency which she also knew to be impossible; for it was evident, at least to her keenly observant eyes, that Julia carefully avoided all occasions of conversing with him. Yet, nevertheless, she heartily wished her to be where those tiresome eyes could neither see nor be seen.

Had Amelia not made this little speech, however, it is highly probable that the colonel might have said in his very gentle, kind, and civil way, that he did not see any very good reason why she could go to stay at the house of Mr. Stephens, and therefore that it would be quite as well perhaps to decline it. But he would as soon have thought

of applying his cane to the shoulders of his son, as of making such an observation after what Miss Thorwold had uttered, and therefore when Julia looked in his face for the fiat which was to decide her proceedings, she received a smile and a nod, which settled the matter at once, and Julia wrote a very civil little note, accepting the invitation, and promising to arrive at Beech Hill by dinner-time on the next day but one.

The interests of Susan, however, were not forgotten in the interval. While Alfred and Amelia were indulging in a tête-à-tête ramble in the wilderness, she opened to both her guardian and his lady, the state of the affair, assuring them both, very earnestly, that she certainly did not want a maid to wait upon her the least in the world, but only, as the colonel had said it was to be so, poor Susan had never forgotten it, and certainly, if she did have any maid at all, she would much rather it should be Susan than any body else.

The colonel, to whom the idea of surprising Julia with the information that she was

mistress of ten thousand seven hundred pounds, safely placed at three and a half per cent., had long been a source of very agreeable anticipation, smiled upon her with a great deal of affectionate good humour, and said,

“ We will explain to you all about it, my dear, the very day that you come to be seventeen, and there is but a week or two wanting of it now, Julia, and then you will see, my dear child, that I have never forgotten whose arm it was that came between my head and the sabre that was raised to cut it off. I have done all I could, my dear, and I would have done more still if I had known how. However, it is all very snug and comfortable, and clear, as you will find ; and though I suppose most people would think that your having a maid for the future was rather more than was necessary, Mrs. Dermont likes it as well as I do, in order that you may at once feel the comfort and profit of having had a tolerably good guardian. But seventeen is quite early enough to be of age, Julia, and I

won't do any thing irregular in any way, and that prevents my telling you that you may have Susan 'Jenkins into the house directly, but you have my leave, and Mrs. Dermont's leave too, my dear, to tell her that she may hold herself engaged to come on the 15th of next month."

Julia thanked them both very sweetly for their kindness, and set off forthwith upon another solitary walk to the copse to carry the good news to Susan. Poor Julia! How deep, how very deep was the wound which disappointment had made in her young heart! The autumn sun shone and many a gay bird was still singing amidst the russet boughs, and the nature of Julia was not so completely changed as to make her unconscious of this; but now, the only effect which it produced on her was to fill her eyes with tears.

CHAPTER III.

It was long since the beautiful Miss Thorwold had felt so nearly easy in mind, as she did now. The passionate adoration of her young lover seemed to increase with every passing hour, and his devoted parents, seeing the unlimited power she evidently held over his happiness, seemed to look upon her as a being of more than mere human importance. She had no cause to fear any observations of theirs. Alfred had thrown over her the glittering armour of his love, which was in their eyes a sort of holy panoply which it would have been little short of sacrilege to touch. To the repeated letters of the impatient young man, the lawyers had vouchsafed the

most satisfactory answers, stating that the property was of a nature to render the business remarkably simple, and that all the necessary deeds would be forwarded forthwith. From Lord and Lady Ripley she had the most agreeable letters imaginable, in which these affectionate relatives expressed the greatest satisfaction at her happy prospects—promising that the fond uncle would take care to be at the house of Mrs. Knight at the time of the marriage, that he might have the happiness of giving her away, and that the generous aunt would take care to contribute to her *corbeille de mariage*, as soon as she was well enough to go shopping. Even the great bugbear of her existence, her debts, her ever-threatening, ever-present debts, seemed now to be scarcely terrible at all; for did her creditors hold off their urgent claims till she were actually married, and of this her excellent friend Mrs. Stedworth gave her great hopes, she felt such a happy degree of confidence in her influence over her future husband, as to make the paying them *then* a

matter of very little consequence indeed. Nay, even should the unfeeling brutes, her creditors, trouble her during the short interval which still remained before her marriage, she felt little doubt — *very* little doubt—that she could induce her lover to bring forward the necessary sum, without its causing the least diminution of his ardent wish to receive the blessing of her hand.

In short, when Julia for the first time in her life left the Mount to make an independent visit as a grown-up young lady, she left as happy a party as possible. The colonel and his wife, looking at the beautiful young couple, who reclined upon the sofas, weaving delightful plans for the future, or glided over the lawns, and through the shrubberies like blest spirits in Paradise, as the fulfilment and embodying of all the hopes and all the wishes they had ever formed ; while the beautiful couple themselves, looked back again at them with a fulness of contentment which it was a pleasure to behold. Julia saw all this very plainly when she bade them farewell, and

perhaps she may be forgiven, all the circumstances of the case considered, though she heaved a sigh as she thought how very little her presence was needed in the only home she had ever known.

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At Beech Hill the scene was a very different one. She was immediately converted into a young lady of great consequence, and, better still, she found that Charlotte Verepoint was also a guest there. A feeling which was perhaps *cousin-germaine* to that which would have made Colonel Dermont decline the invitation to his ward, had his intended daughter-in-law not favoured it, had also made the lady of the Grange look a little stiff when a similar invitation to her daughter was communicated to her; but she too, was stopped, ere she gave expression to it, for looking in the face of Charlotte she saw, as of late she had often done, that she looked both heavy-eyed and pale, and therefore, instead of any thing less civil, she said, "I don't quite know, Charlotte, why these quite new people should

be so very out-of-the-common-way civil, as to ask you to stay with them, but as far as I am concerned, my dear, I have not the slightest objection to your accepting it, if you think it will amuse you. What do you say to it, Charlotte? You know that you need not stay an hour longer than you like. And upon my word, I think you would be at a loss what to say civilly, by way of an excuse."

"If you have no objection, mamma," replied Charlotte, slightly colouring, "I should prefer going. And if I do not like it when I get there, I will write to you to send the carriage for me. I dare say Sophy will be able to find means of sending it."

The circumstance of Miss Verepoint's being one of the party was a great pleasure to Julia. Of all the ladies in the neighbourhood she was the only one who had ever seemed to think the little orphan much worthy of notice. Had she been strikingly beautiful as a child it might have been otherwise. Nay, even had some touching story of pitiable dependence been attached to her, she might

have appeared more interesting, but being neither handsome nor ugly, rich nor poor, high-born nor a beggar-girl, belonging to nobody, interesting to nobody, it was not very surprising that nobody had taken much notice of her. Charlotte Verepoint, however, had always been an exception to this natural state of things. The difference in their ages, however, had hitherto prevented every thing like the companionship of equality between them, Julia having till very lately retained so completely the appearance of a child, that the perfectly grown up, and highly-finished Miss Verepoint could only "take a good deal of notice of her," the intimacy of equal friendship was yet to come. And there now seemed an excellent chance that it would come. Neither of them had at this moment the happy flow of young animal spirits which makes every new scene delightful, and both were surrounded by people whom they thought particularly disagreeable, and by a general aspect of domestic arrangement, sufficiently unlike what they had been used to see, to make them feel

themselves not only in a new, but a strange land.

I am not such a novice as not to know that two young ladies, both of them having sufficient beauty, and sufficient unhappiness, to be considered in some degree as heroines, ought never, under any circumstances to suffer the goodness of their hearts, and the exquisite perfection of their high-breeding, and exalted tone of character, to be tarnished and defaced by giving way to the contemptible temptation of quizzing. But unfortunately, both my young ladies, notwithstanding all their sorrows—and both had suffered—were neither of them free from that ensnaring faculty, a strong sense of the ridiculous, and, truth obliges me to confess that, despite the sorrow and the sadness which were most certainly at the heart of each, their first approach to a thorough mutual good understanding, was made by each becoming aware that the other was undergoing a merry martyrdom, from forcing her features to retain a vigorous gravity, while longing to indulge in a laugh.

Mrs. Stephens was certainly at that moment vehemently beset by the danger of a too perfect and overflowing self-satisfaction. She was, as we know, a young married woman—in the most interesting of all situations. She had generously blessed the man of her choice with her heart, her hand, and all her money ! And these claims upon his affection were answered, as her heart assured her, by such a passionate devotion on his part, as placed her among the happy few whose existence bore all the glowing raptures of romance, and all the sober certainty of real bliss into the bargain. This was much ; but it was not all. She possessed, in addition, the ineffable satisfaction of knowing that she had, by the mere force of intellect, converted an ordained Christian priest, into a Socinian philosopher ; and, to crown all, she had now “filled her house” with beauties and heiresses, all of them well born, and all of them from decidedly the most distinguished class of county aristocracy ; while, to render the scene of her festive hos-

pitalities perfect, there was at this most auspicious moment a party of military at the neighbouring town, with all the officers unmarried, and the majority of them, as Fame declared, very nearly allied to nobility.

When Mrs. Stephens met her three young ladies in her pea-green calico-furnished drawing-room, all dressed for dinner, and knew in her heart that three single men, one being George Marsh, and the other two "honourable" military Misters, were coming to dine with them, her bosom heaved with the conscious powers of patronising. She felt that nothing *was* so delightful as being a young married woman with a house full of gay company.

"How charmingly you look, my dear girls, all of you! Our little Overby will speedily become, if I mistake not, the favourite quarters of the military. In fact, you know, when men of high family are quartered in a county town, it becomes a positive duty in the county families to notice them. But it must

be a dreadful bore to do it, unless there happen to be some nice girls in the neighbourhood."

Charlotte and Julia involuntarily exchanged a glance. Celestina, whose arm was entwined in that of her young married friend, gave her a fond squeeze.

"May I inquire, Mrs. Stephens," said Miss Verepoint, "which of our military neighbours are coming here to-day?"

"I have taken care, my dear, that your favourite beau shall be one of them," replied the festive matron with a familiar nod. "We have got the Honourable Mr. Foster, who every one gives to you, and the Honourable Mr. Ford, whom many suspect of having a liking HERE." And Mrs. Stephens playfully pulled (but not so as to derange it) one of Celestina's stout ringlets. We should have asked Borrowdale, for our dining-table holds ten, quite as well as it does eight, but he is gone away. Whether for good or not nobody seems to know. Some people do say that it was the learning Miss Thorwold's en-

gement to Alfred Dermont which sent him off. Perhaps you can tell us something about that, Miss Drummond? It is pretty certain I believe, that he did fall desperately in love with her. And I dare say you can tell us now, whether it came to a proposal or not?"

"If it did," replied Julia, "I never heard of it."

"But it may have been the case, for all that. Miss Thorwold is so excessively admired, that I dare say she never passes a month without receiving a proposal from somebody or other. Some girls mention those things, and some don't, you know. I, for one, was always uncommonly close."

Then, dropping the clinging arm of her particular friend, she turned herself full upon Miss Verepoint, and placing a hand upon each of her shoulders, she said, "I strongly suspect, my dear, that you are a little in my way in that matter. I would bet half-a-crown to a pin, that when a gentleman is sweet upon you, you contrive to keep it a pretty close secret from mamma—eh, Charlotte? You

must let me call you Charlotte now, my dear; and you, too, dear, you must be plain Julia, or pretty Julia now, it must be, I suppose, for every body says that you have suddenly shot up into a beauty. But what I mean is, that I must call you all by your Christian names, for there is nothing on earth so detestable as filling one's house in the country, and then not being intimate. But here come the officers. Your brother is late, Celestina."

Of the two young men who were now ushered into the room by Mrs. Stephens's page, or second footman—for both titles were occasionally given him by his master and mistress—of these two young men, one was the very well-looking, intelligent, gentleman-like sort of personage who has been already alluded to as the son of an old friend of Mrs. Verepoint's, and the other a youth who resembled him in no way, excepting that he, too, had the advantage of a titled father. This Honourable Mr. Ford was just eighteen, rather short, very thin, with red hair and

white eye-lashes, and a general air of silliness in all he said, and all he did, which even his regimentals—for he never put off his regimentals if he could help it—could not always redeem from young-lady neglect, except in cases where the minds of the young ladies were sufficiently developed to render his prefix of “honourable” a plume wide-spreading and graceful enough to overshadow every defect. Of all the new gentlemen, it was this one in particular upon which the buoyant-spirited Celestina had now fixed her hopes and her wishes—and it was long since she had attacked any young gentleman with equal success. Mrs. Stephens’s affectionate sympathy had been, as she gratefully acknowledged, of immense service to her in the progress of this new attachment, for the young man was apt to be a good deal over-looked and forgotten by his brother officers, and the polite attentions of Mr. Stephens, who even without the friendship-taught injunctions of his lady upon the subject, would have felt a strong natural propensity to patronise the

son of a lord, had really contributed a great deal towards making "country quarters" agreeable to the youth, and the consequence was, that the youth, all noble as he was, felt himself extremely well-disposed to accept all the invitations, whether general, "to come in of an evening whenever he liked;" or, as in the present instance, "to meet a party at dinner," which emanated from Beech Hill.

The natural consequence of which was, a most delightful degree of intimacy with the Honourable Mr. Ford.

He danced the Highland reel, too, for he was a Scotchman, and could not possibly do less in return for all the hospitality he received, than offer to teach the young lady staying there his favourite steps.

Perhaps of all the morning occupations in the world, Celestina best liked the practising difficult steps with a young gentleman. She was never tired—no, never! Nor was Mrs. Stephens ever tired of playing. It was, as she said, exactly the sort of thing for a young married woman in her situation to delight in.

In an easy chair, brought to a proper height by sofa-cushions, and her footstool always assiduously placed at her feet by the honourable lieutenant himself, how was it possible that she could do any thing "safer" than play reels to that dear boy and girl? No, she assured her "Liebe" that she had never felt so well since she married, and she only hoped that the being who was dearer to them than themselves, would inherit the taste for music and the dance, which enabled her to pass the lingering hours of expectation so delightfully!

Soon after these pleasant morning pastimes had been established, the Honourable Mr. Ford took such very persevering pains to drill Miss Celestina into the perfection of the Highland fling, that she could not help thinking there was something very particular in his manner; and with a degree of confidence well suited to the tender friendship which united her to her dear young married friend, she mentioned one or two circumstances, in which the perfectly unnecessary

squeezing of her hand made a principal feature, and having done so, desired her, without restraint or scruple, to give her the advantage of her experience, and tell her what she thought of it. Mrs. Stephens answered this appeal in the manner it deserved—that is to say, with equal frankness and good sense.

“My dearest Celestina,” she said, “it is impossible for any married woman, who has already passed through all the agitating ordeal that precedes the life-long union with the man beloved, not to perceive that Ford is becoming passionately fond of you.”

“You really think so, my dearest friend?” said Celestina—“dearest and best,” she added, tenderly impressing a kiss upon her forehead; “you really think so?”

“I do indeed, my love,” was the reply.

“Then, my darling Mrs. Stephens, I will not pretend to deny that I do begin to think so myself. But alas! dearest! I cannot help thinking, too, that he is a year or two younger than I am!”

“Nonsense, child!” returned Mrs. Stephens, in a tone of most welcome indignation—which was indeed quite sincere, for Mrs. Stephens herself was a good dozen years older than her “Liebe,” “nonsense, child! Who ever heard of people falling in love according to the church register? I tell you that Ford evidently likes you, Celestina; and I shall be positively angry, I promise you, if you let any absurd speculations about his youth destroy all that I have been doing for your advantage.”

“Oh! do not suppose me such an ungrateful wretch!” exclaimed Celestina, with great feeling. “I should deserve never again to speak to, never again to see, a young man, if I could for a moment forget all you have done for me! Besides, dearest, I perfectly agree with you in my heart, though my poor nervous spirits wanted the solace of hearing you say something cheering. But I am perfectly certain you are right in your theory. ‘Love, light as air,’ you know, and all that beautiful passage, proves it clearly. Besides, my

dearest Mrs. Stephens, who can be so lamentably blinded as to doubt that marriages are made in heaven? I quite adopt your superior views about the Trinity, and all that, but still I must always go on believing that marriages *are* made in heaven. Because it is certainly a fact that men and women from the very beginning of the world were meant to be joined together in matrimony; and my firm believe is, that ALL are intended to be married, and that when they do not, it is only the effect of accident, like a broken leg, or any other misfortune of that sort. And if dear Ford *is* intended for me by Heaven, I would not be so impious as to prevent it, for any thing that could be offered me! I believe that I do look rather particularly young for my age, which I have told *you*, dearest, though I never told any body else. But my common sense taught me that without it you could never understand things really as they are, and feel the difference it makes when there is no time to be lost; and besides, I feel so

very sure that you will not betray me, that I confessed it without the least scruple."

"Most certainly I shall not betray you, my dear, for I make a principle never to mention the ages of any of the girls that I make friends of. But it is quite childish, Celestina, to talk of your age as you do. A girl at thirty is in the very prime of her youth and beauty; and in my own opinion, no woman knows how to make the most of herself till just about that time."

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This conversation had gone far towards confirming all the hopes of Celestina, and stifling all her fears; and the consequence was, that her spirits were in a most delightful state of fermentation. Whenever this was the case, her dress was sure to glow, as it were, with the bright reflection from her heart, and when George Marsh entered the drawing-room at Beech Hill, to join the dinner-party mentioned above, he positively started when his eye first caught sight of her costume. Her robe was of very thin orange-

coloured silk, which, being quite new, and very fully flounced, stuck out in all directions to such an extent, that she seemed almost to fill the room ; and being considerably taller, as well as stouter than the two other young ladies, who where, moreover, clad in white, and in all ways as simply dressed as it was well possible for ladies to be, she really looked like a huge cherry-cheeked figure of wood, set upon a stage to personate a giantess. On her head she had fastened a net veil, embroidered in large flowers by her own fair hands, this hung down behind, sometimes permitted to appear over one shoulder, and sometimes over the other. An immensely full-blown, artificial, cabbage-rose bloomed over her right ear, while just in front of the left sprouted a bunch of bright-blue convolvulus, leaves, tendrils, and blossoms, sportively stretching themselves till they caught the veil at the back of her head, where their playful gambols were trained into usefulness by being made to attach that graceful piece of floating dra-

pery to the redundant hair beneath. Poor George Marsh ! It was a great weakness to care so very much about it. But he blushed up to the very top of his high forehead as he looked at her ; and then, certainly without intending to do it, he turned his eyes upon Miss Verepoint. It could not have been from any unconscious wish to observe the contrast between the two figures, because his memory rendered the assistance of his eyes on that point quite superfluous—but it might have been done mechanically, perhaps, to see how she bore it.

And ten to one it was, for the same reason, that Miss Verepoint turned her eyes towards him. The eyes just met, and were instantly cast, as by the same movement, on the carpet, but not before they had said a great deal more than they intended to say. The eyes of George had plainly said, “ Pity me ! ” and the eyes of Charlotte had as plainly answered, “ I do.” And before another moment had passed, they were standing beside each other,

though probably neither of them knew how it happened; it might be, perhaps, only because he generally did take Miss Verepoint in to dinner, and that he thought it was as well to have his arm ready when the signal should arrive. He spoke to her in a low voice, and she answered him in the same tone, and with a quiet air of kindly intimacy, that made him speedily forget that there were any such things as orange-coloured sarsenet and cherry-coloured cheeks in the world.

Mrs. Stephens' dinner was one of a class by no means so small in number as it ought to be. It may not yet appear to indicate any great refinement of taste, or any particularly exalted tone of moral feeling, to make the dinners of such a personage as Mrs. Stephens the subject of a grave philippic. But, nevertheless, conscience urges me to say a few words upon the subject, because it is one that, however vulgar, is of very decided importance to the comfort of that numerous and respectable portion of the human family, who like to live well, without having the power of

seeking this indulgence in that exalted sphere (I speak of earth and not of heaven).

“Dove si puote qual que si vuole.”

The grave philippic that my conscience urges me to make against the dinner of Mrs. Stephens is, that it was COLD. Now as every body *may* have their dinners hot, if they will only take the trouble of making a little fuss about it, I think it is doing a service to all the Mr. and Mrs. Stephenses in the world, and there are a great many of them, to assure them that if their dinners consisted of all the delicacies of the season, they would be worth nothing if they were cold. Having discharged my duty by saying thus much, I may proceed at once to the scenes which took place in the drawing-room after the cold dinner was got through and done with.

Mrs. Stephens, who very correctly thought that her dinner was not at all colder than usual, was in high spirits, as all ladies must be who feel conscious that they are presiding over exactly such a fête as their favourite day-dreams had led them to arrange

as precisely that which they should best like to preside over. It was quite a *county* party, and of the most distinguished as well as of the most agreeable kind. It was so difficult to get a party of pretty girls together!—and so much more difficult still to get a set of “good” men to meet them! But she had managed to do both. Talent might do any thing, she believed, and this was as true at Stoke as it would be in the gayest neighbourhood in the world.

Such were the thoughts which regaled her fancy as she sipped her coffee (although the coffee was as cold as the dinner), and such thoughts could hardly fail to make her gay, animated, and delightful. Even the interval which the gentlemen thought it civil to bestow upon Mr. Stephens’ thin claret, thick port, and hot sherry, did not appear tedious, such power has the animation of a “fine spirit” in producing the “fine issues” which lead to enjoyment!

“Celestina!” exclaimed Mrs. Stephens, placing herself at the pianoforte, “I must

positively play over poor dear Ford's favourite reel. I know he will be in the drawing-room the moment he hears it. Give me my footstool, Celestina. I don't mind any of you, my dear girls, so I shall not apologise for my chair, and my cushions, and all the rest of it. You should all of you try to get intimate with young married women, and go to stay with them. There is nothing so useful. Celestina Marsh is a perfect treasure! You, my dear Miss Dermont, my dear Julia, I mean, you will soon, I dare say, have a nice opportunity, for when Alfred Dermont is married, of course there is nobody so likely to be asked to stay with his wife as you. Where are they to live, dear?"

"I do not think it is quite settled yet," replied Julia, with resolute and very respectable composure.

"I understand. I presume, dear, that you are not yet quite taken into all their counsels. What a beautiful creature she is! Is not she, my dear Charlotte? Such a complexion! It is perfectly divine. But, ah, me! poor dear

creature, when she has been married as long as I have, I dare say she will flush after dinner, just as I do."

And here Mrs. Stephens ceased to indulge her fingers in rambling over the keys, raising both hands to her face, which really was all in a glow, nose, eyes, cheeks, and forehead.

"It is quite shocking, positively. My face is as hot as a coal; but young married women I believe, always are so, therefore it is no good to complain. Celestina! How abominably idle you are this evening! I won't practise playing, if you won't practise dancing. Do you all know Scotch steps, girls? I certainly do think that a Scotch reel is the loveliest dance in the world; all girls ought to learn it. It is the most bewitching style of thing imaginable. Something so playful, so frolicsome, so gay. Do you know it, my dear Miss Vere—my dear Charlotte, I would say? Is it not detestable to see how ceremony sticks to one, even when one is most determined to throw it off? But we will not be mastered by it, wil

we, dears? No! by my self I swear we will not. But tell me, Charlotte, do you know the Scotch reel?"

"Not very well," replied Miss Verepoint, "but I have seen the Miss Murrays dance it. I believe, however, that it ought to be danced by more than two."

"Two, three, four, I do not believe it signifies a farthing how many, or how few, provided there be a minstrel who will accompany them with spirit, and active heels, whether many or few. This is the style of play for it," and here the animated hostess began to thump the keys till they seemed to roar under the infliction. "Celestina!" she cried, "set off this minute, or I will not touch the instrument again to-night, and then we shall see what Ford will say. That's right, dear, dance away! I have no notion of wasting my sweetness on the desert air."

Miss Marsh had begun some dancing and prancing evolutions at half speed, upon hearing the threatening remonstrance of her friend; but, as there was no Mr. Ford there,

the inspiration was wanting, and after "setting" a little, and crossing twice with swimming drapery but languid limbs, she suddenly stopped, and, addressing Miss Verepoint, said,

"I should not at all mind our being seen dancing together. Gentlemen always like that, it looks so good-humoured and lively; but I don't at all like to do it all by myself. Do dance with me, Miss Verepoint! You say that you have seen the Murrays dance it, and if so, you must know how to dance it yourself. Nothing can be more easy. Do dance with me, Miss Verepoint!"

What was it that pleaded in the heart of Charlotte for compliance with this particularly disagreeable request? Was it that she thought her friend and neighbour, Mr. Marsh, would feel less annoyed if, when he entered with the other gentlemen, he should find his sister dancing with her, instead of making an enormously stout full-grown fool of herself alone? or was it that she wished to give George Marsh's sister something of conse-

quence in the eyes of the whole party by joining herself in the unnecessary exercise? Whatever the cause of her doing it, the effect was that she rose with the most gentle, quiet movement possible, and, greatly to the surprise of Julia, placed herself on the floor, opposite Celestina, who really looked big enough to swallow her up, and actually began moving her beautiful little feet in time to the thundering notes Mrs. Stephens was torturing out of the pianoforte.

At this moment the door opened, and the four gentlemen walked in. Miss Verepoint, whatever she might wish, had not courage to proceed, but instantly stood still, while Celestina, who the moment the door opened felt all the vivacious energy she had wanted before, set off again alone, like one possessed, exclaiming as she passed and repassed the blushing Charlotte, "Oh! you shabby cheat! Look at her, Mrs. Stephens! Only look at her! Is it not abominable?"

Mrs. Stephens having obtained the desired object of showing "the gentlemen" what a

very pleasant, lively party they were, twisted her arm-chair round upon its castors, and said, "I only wish you had all come in five minutes ago! Oh! those two mad-caps! They have been making me play reels for an hour by Shrewsbury clock! I am delighted that you are come to keep them a little in order, for they positively make me do just what they like. Charlotte, I have a great mind to punish you by making you sit with all the sobriety of a judge to make tea for me; but I suppose if I do this, that Miss Celestina will be jealous of her ancient privilege, so on that particular point we must let things remain in *statu quo*, for fear of consequences."

Miss Verepoint made no reply to all this lively and affectionate familiarity, contenting herself by quietly retreating to her chair, and addressing some trifling remark to Miss Drummond who was sitting near it.

George Marsh, meanwhile, was so utterly confounded by what he had seen and heard, that, having made two steps into the room, he stood, as if he had been shot, but had not

yet fallen. That Miss Verepoint should be skipping about the room to the thumping of Mrs. Stephens's boisterous fingers, and with his romping sister for a partner, had something so strange and unnatural in it, that he seemed to doubt the testimony of his own senses, as he contemplated the scene. But that she should permit herself to be called "Charlotte," and to be threatened with the office of tea-maker by her detestable hostess, was so much stronger still, that after a moment's meditation, he determined frankly to ask her if she did not find such familiarity rather greater than she liked.

Miss Verepoint was perhaps more vexed at this moment than she had ever felt in her whole life before. Conscious, fully conscious of the motive that had brought her there at all; conscious, fully conscious also, of that which had led her to share in the gambols of Miss Celestina, she felt so deeply, so heartily ashamed of herself, that she would have given her right hand could she have crept out unseen from the gay delights of

Mrs. Stephens's select party, and herself in her own dear bedroom at the Grange.

In this state of mind, the *naïve* questionings of George Marsh were any thing but agreeable.

“May I ask you, with the freedom of an old friend,” said he, “how it has happened that this presumptuous lady has acquired the courage of addressing Miss Verepoint with such startling familiarity?”

Charlotte coloured violently, and remained silent long enough to let George Marsh read in her half-averted face a degree of emotion which led him to think that some influence stronger than any Mrs. Stephens could exert must have produced what he had witnessed. Had she thus permitted herself to be levelled with his sister, because she was his sister? Something a little like this thought had once or twice occurred to him before, and this, together with the blindness to consequences, which is so common a symptom in cases of love, is the only excuse I have to offer, for that and

other presumptuous thoughts, which had certainly of late been gradually stealing into his heart. Miss Verepoint, however, did not intend that his question should remain unanswered, she only waited till she felt that she had sufficiently recovered her composure to speak as she wished to speak, and then she said,

“I cannot be surprised at your remark, Mr. Marsh, as something very like the same question had just occurred to myself; but I am unable to give any satisfactory answer to either. The truth is, I have no business here at all; my coming was a folly, of which I feel ashamed, and both you and I must accept this feeling as an atonement.”

There was, perhaps, the least atom in the world of bitterness in this speech. Poor Charlotte's own reproaches had been severe enough to make her feel that those of Mr. Marsh were quite unnecessary; and she certainly wished to make him feel this too; but in this she failed completely, and so completely

did he misunderstand her, that a meaning the very reverse of what she wished to express was what he found in her words.

George Marsh was as far removed from any thing approaching to presumption as it was possible for a man to be, and there was in honest truth, no presumption in his believing at the bottom of his heart that Charlotte loved him. She did love him; and the only mistake was that she had not kept her own secret quite as well as she fancied she had. Unfortunately, most unfortunately for him, George fancied that her words conveyed the confession that she was domesticated in this strange manner with Mrs. Stephens, in consequence of the folly of expecting to meet him there, and that his fastidious delicacy, as well as her own, must accept of this as an apology.

“Presumption is a less deadly sin than ingratitude,” said George Marsh to himself, as he walked home that night by the light of the moon.

He said it more than once, and as there was nobody to contradict him, he became, before he reached Locklow Wood, perfectly convinced that it was so. Whereupon he walked into his study instead of going to bed and before he left it, he wrote the following lines.

“ In such a case as mine, Miss Verepoint, there is no opening for apology, no pretence for excuse. The simple truth must take its chance, and if it does not plead its own cause, it is hopeless to say any thing else for it. I love you, Miss Verepoint, and I now avow, what you surely perfectly well know already, only for the desperate purpose of forcing you to pronounce my doom. The contrast between the happiness of the hours I pass in your presence, and the misery which arises from the perilous uncertainty which comes upon me in your absence, is more than I can bear. If I had no hope, it seems to me that I should be less wretched than I am at present. Per-

haps I may think otherwise when I receive your answer.

“GEORGE TREMAYNE MARSH.”

Never surely did an avowal of love from a favoured lover reach its destination at so unpropitious a moment. When Miss Verepoint had dismissed her maid, whose unusually grave demeanour gave her silently but very plainly to understand, that she, the maid, found herself exceedingly put out, and very ill at ease in her present quarters, when she had dismissed the solemn-looking Sophia, she sat down in her dressing-gown before the glass, and paying much less attention to the image upon it than it deserved, fell into a reverie as grave as Sophia's face, upon the nature of the position into which her unauthorised attachment had led her.

In what could that attachment possibly end? COULD she submit to pass her days in sisterly familiarity with Celestina Marsh? Could she permit herself to be the frequent and intimate companion of Mrs. Stephens?

Hitherto it had ever been her mother's feelings under such associations, which had appeared to her as the great obstacle to her union with Mr. Marsh; but now, for the first time, perhaps, she became fully aware that she could not endure such association herself.

“But how am I to act, in order to convince him at once that I have made up my mind to put an end for ever to the folly which can only lead to the ultimate misery of both? Would to Heaven he would speak openly at once, and then it would soon be over.”

No young lady ever breathed a wish in closing her eyes, that was more punctually fulfilled at her waking than was this of Charlotte Verepoint. When at the usual hour she rang her bell, her maid entered, bearing in her hand the short and pithy note, which has been faithfully given above.

“Come back to me in ten minutes, Sophy,” said the young lady, who knew the handwriting at a glance.

“He is right, he is quite right,” said she,

after reading his letter, and wiping away a natural tear or two, at the "end all" at which they had arrived. For she felt that the ten minutes she had bargained for would be quite sufficient to permit her writing all she intended to say in return. She took a pen, and rapidly wrote the following words :

"The many hours which we have lately passed together, have been more pleasant than wise. And I am so fully aware of the various reasons which must make the continuance of them highly objectionable for both of us, that I rejoice at the opportunity you have now given me of telling you that they must cease. God bless you, Mr. Marsh ! Be but as happy as I wish you, and you will have no reason to quarrel with your destiny. I shall explain to my mother with all confidence, and the most perfect truth, the reasons which must prevent our seeing you at the Grange for the future. Farewell!"

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"Celestina, I have business which renders my return to Germany absolutely necessary,"

said George Marsh to his sister, two days after he had received this terrible letter; for which important communication his sister afforded him an opportunity, by going home across the fields before breakfast, for the purpose of selecting a few more favourites, from her store of artificial flowers, in compliment to the Honourable Mr. Ford, who had been again favoured with an invitation to dinner.

“Going to Germany again?” she exclaimed, looking considerably astonished at the intelligence.

“Yes, Celestina, I must return to Germany, and I wish you to tell me if you have any objection to passing a few months with my mother’s old aunt at Carnarvon?”

“Objection, George? Good gracious, yes! To be sure I should have an objection. A horrible old woman like that, who never sees a man from January to December. How can you have the brutality to propose such a thing?”

“I should be very sorry, Celestina, to propose, or at least to urge upon you, any thing

that you disliked. But what is there you would prefer to this, my dear sister? I must go to Germany. It is absolutely necessary that I should do so, and what should you propose doing with yourself during my absence?"

"Why, to stay here, to be sure," she replied. "I really do not believe, George, that you intend to be so provoking as you really are. But, to be sure, there never was a girl so much out of luck as I am. Do only look back now, yourself, to every thing that has happened to me since you came home. You found me all but engaged to poor dear Wheeler, and you contrived, somehow or other, to affront him so violently at Colonel Dermont's breakfast party, that I don't think he ever spoke to me afterwards. There is many and many an obstinate self-willed girl who would have plagued a brother out of his life for playing her such a trick, and then broke her own heart into the bargain; but you know as well as I do, George, that I exerted myself to the very utmost to bear it well.

And when poor dear Waters gave me reason to believe that he loved me, I turned my thoughts from Wheeler, and was ready to devote myself to him with all the constancy of woman's love, when not strangled like mine for poor dear Wheeler in the very birth. And what happened next, George? Your thoughtless inattention to my feelings is carried to such an excess from mere natural hardness and callousness of heart, that I should not be the least bit surprised in the world, if you were to say that you did not know any thing about it; that is what you would like to say, isn't it, George? but it is no good to talk and dwell upon what is past and gone. It is only tearing one's feelings to pieces for nothing. Leave alone poor Waters then, and just look at the state of things now between me and the Honourable Mr. Ford. He is devoted to me, George; heart and soul he is devoted to me, and if you don't believe me, ask Mrs. Stephens—ask her who is the only really kind friend I ever had in the world—and if after you have asked, you have still the heart to

turn me out of this dear place—the very house in which I was born, and that too at such a moment—why all that is left is to pray to God that I may not live long.”

The miserable George whose thoughts were occupied by a variety of painful subjects, had not distinctly heard one word in ten of Celestina’s whining lament, nor clearly understood one in twenty. But when she drew forth her handkerchief, as she naturally did when speaking of the desirability of her approaching death, he understood enough to make him decide upon not attempting to control her, and gently taking her hand, said,

“Do not let my going vex you, Celestina; you shall stay here, if you like it. I hope a month or two may enable me to return, and perhaps, Mrs. Stephens will let you be a good deal with her during the interval.”

“To be sure she will, George,” gaily responded his sister; “you know very well that she is never contented without me, so you need have no uneasiness whatever on my account.”

And here the conversation stopped, for neither party seemed to think that there was any more to be said. Luckily Mr. Marsh had become aware that a good deal of prudence was necessary in all pecuniary affairs in which his sister was concerned, as from some peculiarity in her organisation, she had no power whatever of keeping possession of a shilling as long as streamers and flounces could be procured in exchange for it ; and he therefore appointed the old woman, formerly his nurse but now his housekeeper, to be his chancellor of the exchequer during his absence, charging her, however, to make her young mistress as comfortable as she could, and to let her have all the money she could spare after defraying the needful expenses of the house, and remitting to him the very small sum which he considered needful for himself. And all this being settled he kissed Celestina on each of her cherry cheeks, and set off on foot for the railroad—the love, the grace, the refinement of Miss Verepoint resting upon his memory like a dream, the

only certain and quite intelligible feelings that accompanied him being shame and repentance, for the vanity which had beguiled him into the hope that had been so suddenly crushed, and a deep but perfectly resigned conviction that happiness in this life was not intended for him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE breakfast-table at Beech Hill on the morning which followed Mrs. Stephens's first attempt at assembling a pleasant county party around her, was not a gay one. Mrs. Stephens herself, indeed, was all charming vivacity, and Mr. Stephens issued from his small study, the very model of a literary country gentleman; a review in one hand, and a small bill for guano in the other.

But Miss Verepoint, the chief pride and boast of the party, looked as pale as ashes, and answered the tender inquiries of her hostess, which were accompanied with an intimation that she must "try to get her colour up by the evening," for that she had

more beaux coming, by saying that she felt so unwell as to have made her send home for the carriage.

The brightness of Mrs. Stephens's countenance was suddenly and very perceptibly clouded by this intelligence, and her condolences uttered in a tone which displayed her disappointment quite as conspicuously as her sorrow.

"It is very unfortunate to be sure. I have made so many preparations for a pleasant party, that I can't help being a little vexed certainly. I can't help thinking you are in a great hurry to get away, my dear Miss Verepoint. I am sure if you have got a cold, or a mere accidental headache, or any thing of that sort, you should be well nursed and taken care of by the ladies and gentlemen both. Do think better of it! and let the carriage take us all a little airing instead of carrying you home."

Miss Verepoint, however, was not to be shaken; she really felt ill, and had no faith whatever in the curative effects of the pro-

mised nursing. This information was a sad blow to poor Julia, for the whole fabric of her resolution to be exceedingly happy was shaken by it. The manners of Miss Verepoint towards her were so kind and flattering, that she had looked forward to an increased intimacy with her as one of the very pleasantest hopes which the blank future could possibly offer ; and she was puzzled, too, as well as pained by her sudden retreat. They had passed half-an-hour together in the room of the elder young lady before descending to the drawing-room the day before, and there had been a mutual anticipation of pleasure from each other's society expressed between them, which made the departure of Charlotte as much a matter of surprise to Julia as to their unfortunate hostess.

“ And where is Miss Marsh, I wonder ?” said Mrs. Stephens, ringing the bell with an angry sort of jerk. “ Do you suppose she means to leave me, William, to pour out the tea and coffee myself ?”

“ Certainly not, dearest ! She could never

think of behaving in that sort of way. It is quite out of the question. But it is not all young ladies, Miss Verepoint, that have such hair as yours. Some ladies' hair requires a vast deal more to be done to it than others—and perhaps it may not look so well after all, you know."

"Tell Miss Marsh that the coffee is in," said Mrs. Stephens to the servant who answered the bell.

"Miss Marsh went out quite forward in the morning, ma'am," said the man, "and I don't believe she is come back since."

"Gone out?—not come back?—very extraordinary, isn't it, William? Upon my word I must make Miss Celestina understand that I don't quite approve of it. It is so exceedingly inconvenient and troublesome not to be ready for breakfast. Do step out, William, and look over the style leading to Locklow. Of course she is gone home about some of her fidgets. Really it is very disagreeable."

Mr. Stephens, with his accustomed devo-

tion to his lady's will, left the room, but returned to it again almost immediately, bringing the defaulter with him.

"Upon my word, Celestina, you are absent without leave," said Mrs. Stephens, with a little sharpness of accent.

"I know it, my darling, dear Mrs. Stephens!—I know it perfectly well! And I believe I have walked at the rate of six miles an hour that I might get back in time, for I positively would not let you pour one single cup of coffee out of that heavy pot if you would give me ten pounds. But you will be able to pass judgment on me better when you hear what has happened. I had just galloped over this morning to speak a word to old Sarah about something I wanted, and after I had remained in my own room for about five minutes, looking for a particular thing in one of the drawers, I got a message from my brother, desiring to speak to me in his study. Well, of course I went as soon as I had done what I was about, and what do you think I got for my obedience?"

“Perhaps,” said the host, “it was a box on the ear, Miss Celestina, to punish you for trusting yourself in those lonely fields at such an early hour in the morning.”

“No, indeed, Mr. Stephens, that was not it,” replied the young lady, “nor any thing else that looked like particular attention to me; but on the contrary, it was to inform me that he was going to take himself off to Germany again. Why or wherefore, Heaven only knows, for he never condescended even to hint at his reasons.”

“Well, really that *is* very odd—is it not, Liebe? Did he say any thing about it when you gentlemen were left to yourselves after dinner yesterday?”

“No, indeed, love, not he,” replied Mr. Stephens; “but of course he has got his own reasons. Perhaps he is gone to buy books. Did he say how long he was going to stay, Miss Celestina?”

“Not a word, not a single syllable, good, bad, or indifferent,” she replied; “and I must say that I think it is perfectly abomina-

ble to leave me in that great dismal house without a soul to speak to. I am sure I do not know what I should do if it were not for you, my dearest Mrs. Stephens ! But you are all kindness, and certainly the most delightful young married woman that ever girl was lucky enough to get for a friend !”

Charlotte Verepoint trembled from head to foot. It was not merely from emotion at hearing that the man she loved had left his country, driven from thence by her, for half a moment’s consideration sufficed to make her feel that it was the best and wisest step that could be taken for the tranquillity of both. But poor Charlotte trembled lest she should be unable to conceal the interest she took in the news, and again it was female artifice to which one of the truest of human beings had recourse in order to conceal what, as a woman, it was her positive duty to hide. She let fall both her gloves and her smelling-bottle on the carpet, and the movement necessary to recover them gave her the relief she wanted, by enabling her to escape

the eyes which she fancied were fixed upon her.

But the device was altogether superfluous; for Mr. Stephens, Mrs. Stephens, and their friend, Miss Celestina, were all so fully occupied by the interest which they took in the intelligence themselves, and also by their coffee and eggs, that it never entered the head of either of them to look in the face of Charlotte Verepoint, in order to ascertain what she might think about it. But the old adage, "set a thief," &c., proved itself worthy of all credit on the present occasion, for little Julia Drummond saw more than either of her experienced seniors. Not, indeed, that it was the present occasion only which had enlightened her. The few days that Miss Verepoint had passed at the Mount at the time of Miss Thorwold's first visit there, had sufficed to convince the young Julia that George Marsh was the only person in the world whose name was likely to make Charlotte's cheek turn either red or pale, and now, although my no means intending to pry into

her secret thoughts, her eyes turned involuntarily towards her on hearing the statement of Celestina.

This glance was quite sufficient to confirm all her former observations, and her own heart beat as she perceived poor Charlotte's efforts at concealment.

"I am afraid I have cut my finger!" said Julia. "How very clumsy."

This was, of course, quite enough to draw all eyes upon herself, and Mr. Stephens, in particular, was exceedingly anxious to examine the poor ill-used little finger; but it was already twisted up in her pocket-handkerchief, and by the time they had all talked a little more about it, the danger was pretty well over, and Charlotte Verepoint was doing all she could to feel extremely glad that poor George had taken such effectual means to ensure the separation she had recommended.

Before the carriage arrived for Miss Verepoint, she whispered an invitation to Julia to accompany her into her room, and, as soon as they were safely tête-à-tête, she said,

I am afraid, dear Julia, you will think I am using you very ill by running away, but I cannot undertake any more evenings like the last. It is not that I mean to give myself airs, but that I really do not exactly know how to behave. You managed far better than I did, and contrived to sit so quietly still while Miss Marsh and myself were performing our graceful evolutions by way of practice, that you have less reason to fear a repetition of the scene than I have."

"I must not complain of you, Miss Verepoint," replied Julia, laughing; "but to my fancy it is *you* who have managed best, for it is quite impossible, you know, for me to have a headache too. Mrs. Stephens would be sure to send for the apothecary to ask him a few philosophical questions upon the possibility of infection in headaches. No ; I must stay till my promised week is up."

"Then will you promise to let me try to behave better to you at the Grange than I have done here," said Charlotte, eagerly; "will you

promise to pass a few days with me when you have completed your term here?"

Julia was delighted. "How very kind of you, my dear Miss Verepoint," she said, "I shall like it so much!"

"You have promised to stay a whole week, have you, Julia? then what day may I tell mamma that you will be her guest? Perhaps you will like to go home for a day or so between your two visits?"

"No," replied Julia, colouring, "I shall not wish to do that. I can desire them to send me any thing I want from the Mount, without going home for it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, dear Julia, for the sooner you come to me the better I shall like it."

And then it was settled between them that Mrs. Verepoint's carriage should come to Beech Hill for her on the following Monday, after which, both agreeing that it would be very bad behaviour to remain chatting any longer, they re-entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Stephens and Celestina were talking and laugh-

ing at a great rate when they opened the door, but ceased rather abruptly as soon as they made their appearance within it. An abundance of civil things were then said upon the regret felt at seeing Miss Verepoint equipped for departure, and the carriage was announced before the subject was exhausted.

Julia was greatly afraid, and certainly not without reason, that her presence destroyed an animated tête-à-tête between Mrs. Stephens and her friend, Miss Marsh, but for a time she was aware that civility required her both to give and to receive the annoyance which such a superfluous presence was sure to produce ; but she was obliged to submit to it, for it might have been as well to accompany Miss Verepoint to the Grange at once, as to have retired to her own room in order to keep herself out of the way. So there she sat, poor girl, endeavouring not to perceive the nods and winks of intelligence exchanged by her companions as they gently led the conversation, and then firmly fastened it upon "the officers," their likes and their dislikes—the chances for and

against their being able to marry, even if they *were* seriously attached, poor dear fellows ! and the immense advantage that it was for a neighbourhood when “the officers” sent into it were, as in the present instance, of noble families ; for then, if any thing *did* come to any thing, it could never be called a *bad* match, let what would come of it.

For Julia to join in this conversation in any way by which she could hope to make herself agreeable was out of the question, but she went on assiduously knitting a purse for the colonel, smiled whenever she was spoken to, and answered every question she was asked as well as she could. But this morning, and the next, and the one after, did certainly seem of very unusual length, nor did an occasional tête-à-tête walk in “the grounds” with Celestina greatly mend the matter. The theme was still the same, varied only by occasional questionings as to the wedding clothes of Miss Thorwold.

This was all very disagreeable, tedious, and trying to the spirits, but in Julia’s estimation

the *lively* evenings were infinitely worse. The Honourable Mr. Ford, who had before been a frequent visiter, now became a constant one, and the nods and the winks of the morning conversations which followed the evening sports, became more mysterious than ever. For several of these happy evenings the vehemence with which Celestina enjoyed herself, and the exhilarating persuasion that "poor dear Ford" really was very much attached to her, or he never would *keep on coming* so constantly, prevented her from perceiving that poor dear Ford was beginning to relax a little in his practising instructions, and that he frequently sat down by Miss Drummond, and began talking to her when he ought to have been placing Miss Marsh's feet in the right position for "setting." But at last the detestable truth flashed upon her and she bolted Mrs. Stephens's bedroom door in order to exclude Mr. Stephens for several minutes beyond the usual time (the two ladies always indulged in a short little "con-fab" before he was admitted), in order to give

herself an opportunity of asking her friend's opinion on the subject.

“Now, don't deceive me, Mrs. Stephens, there will be no friendship in that, but totally the reverse. I want you to tell me with perfect and entire sincerity what you think of Ford's sitting down four different times last night close to that odious white-washed little wretch, Miss Drummond. Only just tell me what you think of it ; that's all I ask?”

“Why, my dearest Celestina, what can I think of it, but that men, the great majority of them at least, are light and inconstant as the wanton wind,” said Mrs. Stephens, shaking her head, and sighing deeply.

“Then good gracious, Mrs. Stephens, why didn't you tell me so at first?” replied the agitated Celestina, with a good deal of asperity. “You have constantly been going on telling me that you knew mankind too well to be deceived, and that it was plain as the sun at noon-day that Ford was in love with me ! I do think that I *am* the most unfortunate girl upon the face of God's earth !”

“It is perfect folly, Celestina, to reproach me with it,” returned the irritated matron. “I said no more than the truth when I told you that I could read the heart of man. There are few women, I will venture to say, of my age, who have studied the subject more, or understand it better. But fine spirits will produce fine issues, Celestina; and where the spirit is not fine, the issue of it will be disappointing in proportion.”

“Why did you not tell me then that the spirit of Ford was not fine, as you call it,” returned Celestina, with an hysteric sob. “I declare before Heaven, that I should never have given my heart to him, as I have done, if I had not been led by you to believe that he was in earnest, and really did mean something. Oh! Mrs. Stephens!—indeed, indeed it is too cruel!”

“Before you accuse me so vehemently, Celestina, would it not be wiser to look about you a little, and see who else there may be who deserves more blame than I do? I am still perfectly convinced that Ford *was* in

earnest, and *did* mean something. But I never told you, did I? that I knew he was proof against the artful attacks of a girl, who is, if I am not very much mistaken, of Indian extraction, and is, therefore, sure to have a good deal of the serpent about her. I never told you, did I, that if a sly creature like that, pretending to look as innocent as a lamb, was to come and sit down right before his eyes, and by constantly refusing to learn the steps which both he and you offered to teach her, gave him to understand that if he had any thing particular to say to her, he must please to come and sit in her pocket, or else she would not listen to him? I did not tell you, did I, my dear, that if this was to happen, he would neither see, hear, nor answer the insidious little hussey? I never undertook to answer for this, did I?"

"I see it!—I see it!—I see it all!" exclaimed the agitated young lady; "and I am *perfectly* certain that you are right. Oh! Mrs. Stephens! what a woman you are! What observation!—What quickness!—

What discernment ! To be sure—I remember it all now, though in the innocent gaiety of my heart at the time, I never thought any thing of it. Do you remember when Charlotte Verepoint got up to dance with me, how this little minx refused to move ? She was afraid to spoil her horrid straight hair, nasty creature, before Ford came in. Oh ! I understand it all now ; and did you observe when I was making the tea, how she pretended there was no sugar in it, for no other reason on earth, take my word for it, than just to make him take her cup, and bring it back to her again. And then the oranges !—oh ! Mrs. Stephens, do you remember the oranges ? How could I be such a fool as not to understand it ? How she first said she would not, and then that she would. What could that be for, I should like to know, but merely to keep him in attendance ? Horrid, sly, hypocritical little monster ! Pretending to look so quiet and modest all the time, as if she were the very model of innocence itself. Well ! to be sure

one may be too simple-hearted and unsuspecting, and that is what I must have been all this time, there is no doubt about it. But I would not change with her artful slyness, no, not if I saw that poor, besotted Ford kneeling at her frightful Chinese-looking little feet! But if there is one thing that at the very bottom of my heart I do hate and detest more than any thing else in creation, it is a regular sly flirt like Julia Drummond! I know well enough what it is to feel the heart touched, even when the sentiment is not one calculated to endure for life. I know that, for the time, it is really honest and sincere, and an innocent, frank-hearted girl like me, often gives herself up to it for the moment, perhaps more than she ought to do, that is with respect to her own advantage; because it is, I know, a sort of thing that will often keep others off. I confess that I may, more than once, have been guilty of this sort of thoughtless folly. But what a difference, isn't there, Mrs. Stephens, between *that* and such conduct as Miss Drummond's! I do

hate her, I have no scruple to say it, with all my heart and soul ! And what is more, I should hate my own self if I did not."

"And very natural too, my dear love," returned Mrs. Stephens, tucking up all her curling-papers under the nightcap, and then carefully arranging the quilled border of the said nightcap, and tying it under her chin. "Heaven knows, I don't wonder at your being angry. But I can't let you stay any longer talking about it now, Celestina, because Stephens has knocked twice, though I dare say that in your agitation you did not hear him ; and, therefore, I must wish you good night, my poor dear, and all I can say is, that when that stiff little girl has taken herself off, I think it is more likely than not, that Ford will be just the same as ever again."

Celestina got up from her chair, and sighed deeply.

"But even if he should, Mrs. Stephens, what confidence can I have ? How can I hope that he will keep on steady long enough

for any good to come of it?" said she, in a tone of profound despondence.

"Well, my dear, I can't help this now, you know I can't, because I must go to bed, if you please, and Stephens must be let in," returned her friend, rather fretfully.

"And you forsake me too! I see you do, Mrs. Stephens," said Celestina, bursting into tears. "But don't fancy I resent it—I don't do any such thing—I know you can't help it. You have most unfortunately brought this unprincipled girl into the house, and I must take the consequences. You can't help it now, I know."

And having uttered these words with another heartrending sigh, she went out, not having strength or spirits to give Mr. Stephens more than one affectionate glance as she passed him.

* * * * *

It is impossible not to suppose that the manners of Miss Marsh towards Miss Drummond were a good deal altered in consequence of this discovery; but, strange as it may seem,

Julia never found it out. The sort of penance she was enduring was of the hopeless kind, which leads to a dull sort of passiveness rather than acuteness of observation ; and had she been obliged to say whether Miss Celestina Marsh had been most disagreeable during the first or the last days of her visit, it is very likely that she would have expressed a preference for the latter period. By slow but sure degrees, however, this dismal week wore away, and Julia having received the willing permission of her guardian, changed her quarters from Beech Hill to the Grange.

Notwithstanding the secret sorrow which lay deep in each of their hearts, the two young girls, now thrown into close and intimate association, soon discovered that they suited each other particularly well, and that there was enjoyment, great enjoyment, in such companionship. Not a syllable was uttered between them, however, respecting their unhappy loves ; which, although different in all other circumstances, had this in common, that they were utterly hopeless, and

therefore that the silence which delicacy and right feeling enjoined, was as salutary as it was discreet. They walked together, they read, they discussed together; and the neighbourly acquaintance was fast ripening into firm and enduring friendship, when Julia received the following note from Mrs. Dermont:

“ My dear Julia,

“ Your guardian and I, and, indeed, Alfred also, think that your visit, though we doubt not that it has been exceedingly pleasant, has lasted almost long enough, and that it is time for you to come home again. One reason why we are anxious that you should do so is, that our dear Miss Thorwold is going away. It is only for a week or two indeed, and it is to visit her excellent friend, Mrs. Knight, whose affection for her it is quite beautiful to witness, and our noble-minded Alfred is the last person in the world to wish that, for his sake, she should do any thing that was ungrateful and wrong; yet, for all that, poor

fellow, he is dreadfully out of spirits, and, we think, and indeed he seems to think too, that your coming home would be a comfort for him; and, after saying this, I am sure you would not wish to delay your return for a moment. There is, too, another reason, your guardian says for your coming home, and that is, that you will be of age the beginning of next week, and though he does not wish to have any party or make any fuss about it, on account of Alfred's not being in spirits, still, he says, it is proper for you to be here. The carriage is to take Miss Thorwold to Crosby on Monday, and as it must pass close to the Grange, it may call for you as it returns.

“Be sure to give all our kind compliments to Mrs. and Miss Verepoint, and-express our gratitude properly for the notice they have so kindly taken of you.

“Believe me, my dear Julia,

“Very sincerely your friend,

“MARGARET ELIZABETH DERMONT.”

The servant who brought this letter waited

for an answer, and Julia, only delaying long enough to convey the far from welcome tidings to her friends, despatched it, containing an assurance that, notwithstanding the happiness she had enjoyed during her visit, it would give her great pleasure to return to the Mount. A few days, therefore, terminated this visit, and once again she found herself in the society of Alfred. At first it seemed to her as if all that had happened, and all she had suffered was a dream, so nearly resembling the ways and manners of the days which were gone for ever was every thing she found. At no time since the fatal breakfast had the manner of Alfred to herself been so nearly what it used to be as it was now, excepting that he was somewhat more attentive in trifles, and treated her less like a child than heretofore. But there was the same unceremonious demand upon her time, and the same sort of tacit avowal that he was not contented to remain long where she was not.

Poor Julia would have been puzzled to say

whether she found more pain or pleasure in this, but the doubt was not permitted to endure long, for the day after her return Alfred invited her, as he had done many scores of times before, to take a walk of two or three miles with him. Had it been possible to refuse the invitation she would have done it; not because she did not like it, but because she was terrified at liking it so much. But she dared not expose herself to the astonishment as well as the displeasure of Alfred, and therefore accepted the invitation with a smile.

Exactly as he was wont to do in the days that were gone, Alfred raised his elbow without saying a word, as a signal that she was to pass her arm under it. The only difference was, that when he had got her hand under his left arm, he crossed his right hand over to take it. He not only took it, but held it, and not only held it but pressed it, pressed it tenderly. Poor Julia! Her chief suffering at that moment arose from terror lest he

should feel or hear, as she fancied he might, how her heart beat.

This state of feeling, however, did not last long ; it could not last longer than the silence of Alfred, and that was soon broken by his saying, “ What a very happy fellow I am, my dearest Julia ! But I do not think that I can reproach myself with ingratitude, for I never open my eyes to the light without fervently thanking Heaven for the unequalled blessings that are showered upon me ! Oh ! Julia, what a woman it is that Providence has selected for me as a wife ! I give you my honour, Julia, that there are moments when her sweetness, her unequalled beauty, her finished grace and heavenly goodness, make me tremble lest it should be all a dream, or, that instead of her being a woman, I should find that she was an angel, visiting the earth to arouse in the hearts of man a stronger wish for heaven ! ”

He ceased, and Julia plainly perceived that he expected her to make a speech in reply.

But what was she to say? Believing in her soul that the woman he thus adored was interested, artful, false, frivolous, and, in fact, as contemptible in every way as it was well possible for a woman to be; believing all this, was she to tell him that he was indeed a happy man, and that she wished him joy of it? Or, scorning such hypocrisy, was she to say that he was quite mistaken, that Amelia was a heartless wretch, perfectly unworthy of him, and that if he wished to be happy he must look elsewhere for a wife—could she say this to him? Yet to say nothing was infinitely worse than either, for it might seem purposely intended to give him an opportunity of guessing what she felt about it herself; and with this terror before her eyes she was beginning to stammer out something about her being certain that he deserved to be happy, when she was fortunately prevented from making the dangerous experiment by Alfred's pressing her arm affectionately, and saying, "But you must not fancy, my dearest Julia, that I forget, when thanking Heaven for the

blessings bestowed upon me, the sweet addition to all my happiness which I possess from the enjoyment of your precious friendship. The heart of man, Julia, is sufficiently capacious to contain more than one strong affection, and when I look back upon all the happy days of our youth, upon your well-trying and well-proved affection for me, and upon all the freshly-remembered proofs you have given from your earliest infancy to the present hour, of the brightest, sweetest nature ever bestowed upon a mortal, when I think of all this, dear play-fellow, I feel that I am a covetous, a most unreasonably covetous man, for that not even the possession of Amelia will content me, unless I may still possess also the partial friendship of Julia Drummond. Tell me, my dear Julia, may I hope for this ?”

Virtue is its own reward, despite all the sneering doubts and carping witticisms which have attacked the assertion ; but it certainly does not always happen that the reward follows so closely upon what calls for it as it did

now. Nothing but the truth, the deep sincerity, the sublime purity of Julia's virtuous feelings could have saved her at this moment from the most cruel, the most fatal embarrassment. But she felt, as she listened to Alfred, a glow at her heart that seemed to elevate her above the reach of sorrow, and conscious of being capable of finding in the friendship he offered, a source of happiness sufficient to cheer and soften her existence as long as life endured, she answered him with equal firmness and sincerity.

"God bless you, my dear, kind Alfred," said she, "for thinking so much and so affectionately of your old companion and friend! And you may very safely believe me when I promise, that you shall never find less affection from me than you have ever done. You have paid me some very fine compliments, dear Alfred, and I will not repeat them back again to you lest you should take them for mere current coin, offered by way of payment; but the thousand and one proofs you have given me, that even in the very strongest

paroxysms of whim and will you could never forget your kind feelings to your babyish little companion, are not very likely to be forgotten."

From this point the conversation proceeded with almost equal pleasure to both. Each felt as if the bar which seemed to have risen between them, was removed, and that they should take good care it never came to torment them again.

Their walk included a visit to the cottage of Jenkins, the wood-cutter, to whose daughter Julia had the pleasure of delivering a very kind message from the colonel, informing her that if she still wished to take the place of her waiting-maid, she might bring herself and her boxes to the Mount on the following Tuesday, that being the day fixed for her first enjoying the dignity of having a maid of her own.

The joy with which this announcement was received both by Susan and her mother, may be easily imagined, and the two friends set off on their return home with the pleasant

consciousness of having left a great deal of happiness behind them.

“Is not Susan a pretty, nice, sweet-tempered-looking girl, Alfred?” said Julia, as they turned away from the cottage.

“Pretty?” replied Alfred, with a laugh. “Upon my word, Julia, you must excuse me if I am a little fastidious on that point. With such forms and faces as yours and Amelia’s perpetually before my eyes or in my memory, it is hardly reasonable to expect that I should find any beauty in such a dowdy-looking little waiting-maid as your Susan.”

“Beauty, they say, is in a great degree matter of fancy,” replied Julia; “and there is something so very guileless and innocent-looking in the countenance of Susan, that I not only think her pretty, but I positively love her, and that must be, in a great degree, from her good looks, because I was too young when she left her home to form any rational judgment as to her character. But I think I never saw any body in my life that I should be inclined to trust more implicitly than Susan.”

“Well, dear, I have no doubt you may be right, but the metal was not sufficiently attractive to make me examine it accurately enough to judge of its intrinsic value,” replied Alfred.

CHAPTER V.

AND now the morning arrived to which the worthy and grateful-hearted Colonel Dermont had been looking forward for years as one of the happiest of his life. He had never said a syllable to Julia, or to Alfred either, of the manner in which every sixpence of Julia's income had been hoarded, in order to augment her little fortune. He had, indeed, frequently mentioned the fact, that the fortune bequeathed to her by her grandmother, was seven thousand pounds, but without giving the slightest hint that it had been increased to half as much again solely by his good management.

At breakfast, the colonel set the example of wishing her joy, "many happy returns," and so forth ; and as soon as the meal was over, he addressed her with a very happy look ; but, at the same time, with a good deal of solemnity.

"And now, my dear Julia," he said, "I must request the favour of your company in my library."

Julia immediately got up to attend him, but without having any notion for what reason she was wanted.

"Alfred !" added the colonel, "I should wish you, my dear son, to come too, and your mother also, if she will do us the favour."

Of course no objection was made, and to the library they all went. The large table, which always stood in the middle of the room, was covered with papers, among which was a large parchment of several sheets, which was laid wide open, as if to gratify the curiosity of all present, and Julia turned pale as she looked at it, for she felt

persuaded that she was looking upon the marriage settlement of Alfred, which had doubtless just arrived, and for which, probably, her signature was about to be requested.

“Have the kindness to sit down, all of you,” said the colonel. They sat down accordingly, and then he drew a multitude of accounts towards him, reading aloud a variety of sums total, purporting to be the receipts and investments of all the half years’, during which he had been receiving Julia’s little income from the funds, and replacing it in her name as regularly.

“And now, my dear,” he concluded, placing several printed documents in her hand, “I have the pleasure of presenting you with vouchers which prove you to be in the possession of stock, worth exactly ten thousand seven hundred pounds sterling. Will you give me a kiss for having managed your little money matters so well?”

Julia hastened to him, and gave the requested kiss, but having done so, said, “You must forgive my being so very stupid, my dear sir, but how can I have ten thousand

pounds, and I know not how many hundreds besides, when only seven thousand were left to me ?”

This question was exactly what the colonel had been looking forward to for the last fifteen years of his life, and he answered it with a smile, then very eloquently expressed all the pleasure it gave him, by modestly stating how he had defrayed all her expenses, and endeavoured, in all things, to treat her as a daughter, in order to prove, to the best of his power, how constantly he kept in mind the service rendered to him by her gallant grandfather.

Nothing could be more touchingly simple, and unmistakably sincere, than the manner in which Julia returned her thanks for all his kindness; and there was such a new and pretty gravity in her look and language as she did this, that the fine eyes of Alfred filled with tears as he looked at her.

“What a sweet creature it is !” thought he, “I much doubt if I shall ever see a man that I shall think worthy of her !”

The colonel, who, according to custom,

looked round at Alfred, to see what he thought of what was going on, perceived how greatly he was touched by it, and not choosing that his idol should be made to shed tears, let the meaning of them be what it might, immediately assumed much gaiety of manner, and said, "Now then, my young lady, you may consider yourself as by far the most independent personage in the family,—for you are the only one who can make ducks and drakes of your property, if such be your wish, will, and pleasure."

"Ducks and drakes?" repeated Julia, laughing, "how can I make ducks and drakes of all this quantity of money?"

"Why, this is the way you may make ducks and drakes of it, my dear. You have only to write a line to our good friend, Mr. Wood, the broker, telling him to send you down a power of attorney by the post, for you to sign, and when you have done it, you may give it to any body you please, who may straight-way sell as much stock as you choose to order, out of the funds, and then, you know, when you have got it, you may change it all

into half-crowns, and make ducks and drakes with it in Mrs. Verepoint's great fish-pond."

"Thank you, sir," replied Julia, catching the gay tone in which he spoke ; "I shall be sure to remember your instructions, when I am seized with a longing for the amusement you mention."

"Only take care, my dear," he rejoined, "that you do not fall in love with somebody who may play the game for you."

Julia smiled, blushed, and shook her head. "I flatter myself there is no danger of that," she replied.

"So much the better, so much the better, Julia," said the colonel ; "and now, without troubling Mr. Wood at all, here is enough for you to amuse yourself, I hope, for six months to come. Here, my dear," he continued, spreading a number of notes upon the table, "here is the first dividend upon your property that I have ever drawn out of the bank ; I received this last July, and you must please to remember, young lady, that (unless indeed you follow my instructions, and send to the broker's) you won't have any more till

next January. Here, my child, put it up, and take care of it, like a good girl." And he collected the notes and put them into her hand as he spoke.

"Is it possible that all this quantity of money is mine!" said Julia, looking half frightened at the sight of her wealth.

"All this quantity, my dear?" replied the colonel, shaking his head. "It is all very well, Julia, for the purchase of bobbins and bows, and to pay the wages of your own maid, you know; and as long as I live you won't want it for any thing else; but in case no more Honourable Mr. Borrowdales should happen to come in your way, I fear you may find out that it is but a poor little income after all. However, my dear, I have a scheme in my head that will bring it up, without the slightest danger, to above five hundred pounds. I have heard of a capital good mortgage, Julia, and you must sell out of the funds, my dear, and invest your money in that. I am expecting almost every post to learn the last particulars about it, and then, by your leave and pleasure, the thing shall

be settled at once, and when this is done I shall feel more at ease about you."

The remainder of this important day was passed for the most part in conversation between Alfred and his parents upon the probable duration of Amelia's visit to Mrs. Knight, and also of what might be the earliest possible day at which they might hope to hear that the "eternal" settlements were completed. Alfred, it is true, occasionally addressed a remark to Julia, first upon one of those interesting themes, and then upon the other, but by far the most enlivening variety which occurred, was a proposal on the part of Alfred, that if Miss Thorwold did not return to the Mount by a certain day, at no great distance, they should go over to Crosby and take possession of her by means of a little gentle violence.

In reply to this proposal Mrs. Dermont suggested that; as a preliminary step, it might be as well to write a pleading letter to Mrs. Knight, beseeching her, in the names of love and pity, to remit a few days of the time for which she had stipulated. This last measure

was proposed very seriously, and very seriously acted upon, and an epistle, signed by the young man and both his parents, was accordingly written, and delivered to Mrs. Knight at her breakfast table, while seated there with the fair Amelia opposite to her.

The lady of Crosby perused the letter with rather a satirical sort of smile, and then handed it to her friend, expecting to receive in return a vehement, and, perhaps, angry protestation that she would not be either cheated or bullied out of the short remnant of peace and happiness upon which she had reckoned, and, in short, that she would not stir a single hour before that which had been already fixed upon. It was, therefore, with considerable surprise that she heard Miss Thorwold say, laying down the letter very quietly, and returning without any great symptoms of discomposure to her coffee and roll, "It is a bore, but I must go."

"*Must go*, Amelia? Upon my word, my dear, I think you are beginning your obedience rather too early. Why must you go?"

"Because I do not like to run the risk of

displeasing any of them. It is quite as well to keep things smooth, you know."

Mrs. Knight looked at her steadily for a moment, and then said, "As I live, Amelia, I do believe that beautiful creature, Alfred, has touched your fancy at last. Do not be ashamed to confess it. You really need not. I told you long ago, you may remember, that comparing him to Lord William was comparing "Hyperion to a Satyr." And now, I suppose, you begin to find out that I was right."

Miss Thorwold looked at her and smiled. Had she smiled without looking at her, Mrs. Knight would have taken it for granted that she had read the riddle aright, but the look puzzled her. There was something spiteful, something bitter in it—but whether against Lord William, Alfred Dermont, or herself, she could not tell, and feeling some little curiosity to discover, she varied her attack, and said,

"That look means to say I am wrong, I suppose, does it not? And in that case I am to presume that despite his fickleness and

falsehood you still hold fast to the belief that his lordship's long visage and black favoris, outvalue all other manly beauty whatsoever."

Amelia did not again look up, but a visible shudder passed over her.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the pertinacious cross-examiner. "You are determined to put me at fault, Amelia. That shudder, my dear, was a vast deal more like hatred than love. I wish you would tell me what it all means. But really since you took that freak of running abroad, you have grown both moody and mysterious—not to mention that you have taken to an exceedingly foolish trick of turning red and white alternately, which is likely, in Amelia Thorwold, to beget more curiosity than admiration."

At no period of the beautiful Amelia's life had she ever been able to endure with patience any thing like an attempt to dive into more of her secrets than it was her will and pleasure to disclose, and it is not difficult to believe that this averseness to enforced confidence was at this moment considerably

stronger than ever. It required a vigorous effort of purpose over passion, to prevent her from bursting out, as she had often done in days of yore, in expressions of resentment and rage against the insidious wish of learning more than was meant to meet the ear; but such efforts were becoming habitual, and it cost, therefore, but one strong gulp to enable her to master the inclination to scold, and to reply with a tolerably easy air of indifference. "I declare to you, my dear Mrs. Knight, that if I knew how to satisfy your affectionate anxiety respecting the state of my affections, I really would do it, but having already told you all I know myself on that worn-out theme, I do not think I shall make the matter any clearer by prolonged discussion. My freak of running abroad, as you still unkindly call it, did certainly so far change me as to give me time for a little serious reflection, the result of which, as I have already very frankly told you, was to make me decide upon marrying Mr. Dermont. Further secret have I none, and considering that I am now endeavouring

to make up my mind quietly and contentedly, to the fate that is before me, I do think it would be more judicious, and certainly it would be more kind, if for the future you would talk no more to me about the state of my heart."

This was so reasonable a remonstrance, that Mrs. Knight, with all her cleverness, and notwithstanding a strong lurking suspicion that her beautiful young friend had some secret or other that was beyond her power to make out, could find nothing better to say in return to it than, "Very true, my dear, you are quite right, and I am quite wrong, so if you really have any heart left, we will endeavour to forget it."

"Thank you," returned Amelia; "and now, then, perhaps, you had better answer the Dermont despatch."

"Oh! true! I forgot the man was waiting, but I hope, my dear, that you do not really mean to run away from me yet?"

"You are excessively kind, my dear Mrs. Knight," replied her beautiful friend, who felt at that moment as if she would rather have bound herself to pass the remainder of her

life tête-à-tête with the dull Mrs. Dermont, than expose herself to any longer endurance of the agreeable Mrs. Knight's intolerable acuteness; "but I am sure you must feel with me that as I have made up my mind to form this connexion, it must be for my happiness to make all things go as smoothly between us, while preparing for it, as possible, and therefore I will beg you to tell them in your answer, that as it is evident my heart yields to the recall, you cannot venture to oppose the whole phalanx, and that I shall be ready to attend them when they come for me."

Mrs. Knight uttered not a single word in reply, but drawing towards her a little writing table that stood near, wrote the answer as nearly as possible in the terms dictated, read it rapidly but distinctly aloud, lighted her taper, slid the note into its cover, sealed it, rang the bell, and gave it to the servant without indicating either by word, look, or gesture, whether she approved the proceeding or not.

Very different from this profound silence was the manner in which the despatch was

received at the Mount. The impetuous Alfred, delighted beyond all measure at the success of his manœuvre, literally danced with glee; his father cried, "Bravo, Alfred! you really seem to understand admirably well how to get your own way," and Mrs. Dermont clasped her hands, lifted her eyes to heaven, and exclaimed: "Was there ever such a dear, gentle, affectionate creature as our sweet Amelia! Ah! Alfred! It is quite plain that you may lead her any way you wish, but I hope it will ever be by a silken rein."

"Silken, my dearest mother!" replied the enraptured Alfred, "it shall be all of roscuds, cotton, and velvet!"

Julia heard the note read, and heard too the burst of rapture which followed it, and then she quietly slipped out of the room, very sure that at such a moment she should not be missed, nor was she; nobody indeed, knew whether she were in the room or not, and being quite aware of this, she determined upon a long, solitary walk, in the course of which she very deliberately and rationally examined the reasons for and against her

remaining in the house during the short remainder of the courtship, provided (that is to say) she were invited by her friend Charlotte to leave it. Of this invitation indeed she was very comfortably secure, both Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter having made her promise that she would let them know as soon as the business which her guardian had talked about was completed, in order that a day might be fixed for her returning to finish the visit which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly curtailed. Julia had so well schooled herself to the necessity of enduring what was painful, that she would not have made the effort she now decided upon, had she feared nothing worse than present annoyance from witnessing the tender scenes which were likely to take place. Her sensations indeed, under this species of infliction were of a very different kind from what the generality of enamoured and hopeless young ladies may suppose. Painful they certainly were, but for the most part this pain arose from the profound belief that the being around whom poor Alfred wandered

with such passionate devotion, such confiding fondness, was wholly and in every way unworthy of him. This was a misery upon which neither her absence nor her presence could produce the slightest effect, either as it concerned her own feelings or his destiny; and it was not this which drove her away, for well she knew that it would pursue and torture her, let her go where she would. But what she did fear was, the demonstration of Alfred's restored feelings of affection towards herself. She was perfectly well aware that from a very early period of their acquaintance, Miss Thorwold had sought to weaken this attachment, and she was also aware that Alfred had suffered deeply from the coldness between them which had followed the spelling scene. This coldness had not only been completely removed during the absence of Amelia, but his affection for his friend and play-fellow had evidently gained in strength by the short but terribly painful interruption which it had suffered. "I shall never," thought Julia, "be able to endure the demonstrations of his renewed af-

fection, his pure, precious, brotherly affection, in her presence, knowing as I do that it is hateful to her to witness it, and that it will moreover infallibly lead to more scenes calculated all and every of them to render me not only odious to him, but really injurious to his happiness."

The nature and object of these meditations had led her, perhaps, almost unconsciously to take the path across the fields which led to the Grange. It is certain, nevertheless, that she did not contemplate walking there when she set out; but by the time that she had fully made up her mind to believe that the most right and proper thing she could do would be to procure a renewed invitation from Mrs. Verepoint, she discovered considerably to her surprise, that she was within ten minutes' walk of the house.

Her resolution was immediately taken, and on she went, well pleased to think that by the promptitude of the manœuvre, she should have a good chance of escaping from the Mount before the fair creature who intended to be its future mistress, returned to

it. She found both the mother and daughter most cordially glad to see her, though a good deal surprised at her mode of getting to them, as it was the first time the ladies of either family had ever ventured upon the experiment.

"I am quite delighted to find that the Mount is within a walk, Julia," said Miss Verepoint, "as it may and must greatly facilitate our meeting. But I presume, my dear, that you do not intend to walk back again?"

"Oh, yes, I do!" replied Julia; "I do not feel in the least fatigued, though I confess I got here without knowing at all what I was about, for I certainly think that Mrs. Dermont would have believed my premature coming of age had led to insanity if I had told her that I contemplated such an excursion."

"And she might well think, my dear, that I was in the same condition, did I suffer you to return on foot."

"Why should she return home at all?" said Charlotte. "The business of coming of

age is all completed, I presume, by this time, and as you ran away from us only for that, and have so very opportunely run back again, I think we should be great geese if we let you escape us again."

"Upon my word, I think so too," said the old lady. "What cause have you to show, my dear, why we should not keep you, now we have got possession?"

"None in the world, my dear Mrs. Verepoint," replied Julia, extremely well pleased to find her wishes so speedily accomplished. "Only, I don't exactly see how I am to dress for dinner."

"And what is our new maid for," said Charlotte, "if she cannot pack up her lady's dresses? If you will please to write your orders to your maid Susan, with whom we already feel so perfectly well acquainted, I will undertake to send them."

"But we must have the maid Susan too, Charlotte," said Mrs. Verepoint. "You may depend upon it that when the colonel decided that Miss Drummond ought to have a maid, he did not intend that she should run

away and leave her Abigail behind her. By far the best way will be to send the carriage over both for the maid and the wardrobe."

It was in vain that Julia protested against giving so much trouble, the mother and daughter both were too really well pleased to have her, for any such formalities to be accepted in the way of obstacle. Julia, therefore, sat down without making any further difficulties, and wrote to Mrs. Dermont relating the fact of her having in her ramblings come upon the Grange without being aware that she was near it, and all the consequences which had followed upon her having mistaken the distance so pleasantly. Nothing could be written with more good-humoured alacrity than the reply, which not only expressed the writer's satisfaction at knowing that her dear Julia was going to renew the pleasure she had enjoyed at her last visit, but rejoiced that she should have timed it so well, as the approaching arrival of their Amelia would prevent their feeling the loss of her society as they must have done at any other time.

CHAPTER VI.

THE beautiful Amelia was by no means sorry to find that Miss Drummond was again absent from the Mount, for not only had she one or two points to gain previously to her marriage, both with Alfred and his parents, but comfortably safe as she felt herself from all possibility of danger from the discovery of her late adventures, she was much better pleased to have no eyes upon her but those which seemed incapable of seeing her but as she wished to be seen, or of judging her, save as she wished to be judged.

As to Julia, she was enjoying herself much more than she had ever expected to do again, and conscious of giving as much plea-

sure as she received, her looks and spirits revived, and her friends reproached themselves with a most extraordinary want of penetration for not having earlier discovered what a treasure they had near them. But they did themselves injustice. Julia never before had been what she was now. Both in person and mind she had been suddenly awakened to a new existence, as if by an enchanter's wand. And herein lies the best excuse for Alfred's blundering preference. Had Julia been, before the fated fête upon the lawn, the same creature that she became afterwards, it is scarcely possible that the blandishments of Amelia Thorwold should have produced the effect they did.

At the Mount, however, every thing seemed to be going on most prosperously, and Julia, if not quite forgotten, was certainly not much thought of by any one. The first two days after Amelia's return were really quite ecstatic days. Alfred literally lived at her feet. Her footstool was his throne, and well inclined was he to exclaim, "Let kings come bow to it." Of course the

colonel and his lady discreetly kept aloof, yet neither were they without their share of enjoyment. The extreme good fortune of having met with such a very beautiful and elegant young woman as a wife for their Alfred, and she too, the grand-daughter and niece of a peer of the realm, was a blessing for which she could not feel too thankful.

The beautiful source of all this happiness was not, however, doomed to share it long without being roused to the recollection of mundane uncertainties by the receipt of a letter which very considerably shook her nerves. Miss Thorwold probably, was not the first young lady who has deprecated the harshly rude and indelicate fashion of presenting people with their letters in presence of an assembled family. Discreet people, indeed, whose minds are ever on the alert to anticipate possible events, and to keep guard over their nerves accordingly, may generally be observed to use considerable caution in their manner of receiving these publicly delivered despatches. Such persons may be seen to put into their pockets, unread, all

letters sealed by a wafer ; and may be observed also, if the address be written in an unknown character, to content themselves for the nonce by a curious examination of that part of the epistle which is addressed rather to the letter-carrier than to themselves, reserving the more personal part of the correspondence till it could be examined without witnesses.

It would be most unjust, in a general way, to accuse Miss Thorwold of any of that very inconsiderate sort of carelessness which leads to the unintentional discovery of private affairs ; but upon the present occasion she felt so completely lapped in security, and so perfectly beyond the reach of any eyes likely to peep at any thing, or to comprehend any thing at which they peeped, if they did peep at all, that she opened a letter, the external features of which were in no degree familiar to her. In short, it was not fastened by a wafer, which would have immediately put her upon her guard, but sealed with an extremely good impression of a true-lover's knot, a symbol in no way

alarming. She opened it and read the first few lines, which sufficed to make her turn as pale as a ghost. The delicate shade of rouge, which, though it harmonised so admirably with her complexion, held no sympathy with her heart, and therefore remained unfaded, only seemed to make her look more unnatural and ghastly. It was less, however, from her own sensations than from the terrified countenance of Alfred, that the unhappy young woman was made conscious how fearfully she was betraying herself. This thought seemed in an instant to turn her trembling nerves to adamant, and, as far as the being perfectly self-possessed could save her, she was no longer in danger. Alfred had flown to her side, and throwing one arm round her waist, seized, with his disengaged hand, the cold, damp fingers of Amelia which held the fatal letter. But the other hand of Amelia was free, and with this she quietly withdrew the letter, and at the same moment suffered her beautiful head to sink upon his bosom, exclaiming, "Oh! dearest Alfred, I feel very ill.

Take me, take me to the window—I want air!”

In an instant the young man had clasped her in his arms, and carried her across the room ; but the window was closed, and while, with the aid of the colonel, who had hastened to his assistance, he threw up the sash, Amelia, by the most natural action in the world, had exchanged the letter for her pocket-handkerchief, the former being safely deposited in her pocket, and the latter pressed against her pallid brow.

Mrs. Dermont, who had felt meanwhile, good lady, as if she ought never to be forgiven for having come down to breakfast without her smelling-bottle, now rushed back into the room with a bottle of pungent salts, which she was about to apply to the nose of the patient, when her hand was gently put aside by that of Amelia, who, looking at her with a smile which was the perfection of sweetness and of languor, said, “ Thank you a thousand times, my more than mother ! but the feeling of faintness has entirely passed away. I am quite well

now." And so she was, save a slight sensation of sickness and inward trembling. She had, however, been very near fainting; the catastrophe, which would have been a very dangerous one, having been prevented solely by the startling emotion produced upon her by the terrified aspect of her lover. This look had roused her as effectually as a bucket of cold water poured over her head could have done, and from that moment she was no longer in any danger of betraying her own secrets.

"I am sadly afraid that I have frightened you all," said she, with one of her own fascinating smiles.

"You have received some bad news I fear, my dear child," said the good colonel, looking at her very tenderly.

"Oh ! no," she replied, once more smiling, nay, almost laughing at the idea. "But I certainly do not wonder at your thinking so. I certainly felt very near fainting, a symptom of weakness that is very rare with me; but I can easily account for it. Do you remember how perseveringly I walked last

night with Alfred on the terrace? We were both of us so deeply occupied by looking at the moon, that we quite forgot how late it was. I may confess now, that when I went to bed I felt over-fatigued; and as I did not sleep well, the same feeling of fatigue hung about me this morning. You must take better care of me, Alfred, in future."

The lamentations and protestations, the hopes and the fears, the sorrow and the joy which followed, may easily be imagined; and when all this was pretty well over, and the breakfast too, Amelia whispered to Alfred that she should like to lie quietly down on a certain comfortable sofa in the library, and have him come and read to her. This was by no means a novel mode of their passing the morning, particularly during the absence of Julia, and a few words from Alfred to his father and mother secured the undisturbed possession of the apartment.

Amelia permitted the happy Alfred to install her on the sofa, and to place himself on a low arm-chair beside it; but when at length, having completed all imaginable and

unimaginable contrivances for her comfort, he smilingly inquired what book they should read, she half raised herself from her recumbent position, and, turning her lovely face towards him, while one hand rested on his shoulder, and the other supported her ivory forehead, she said, "It is my heart, Alfred, that you must read, and no other volume till I have opened every page of that!"

"Adored Amelia!" exclaimed the young man, seizing the hand that rested on his shoulder, and devouring it with kisses—"Adored Amelia! Yes, dearest, yes! Talk to me of yourself, your angel self, and I will listen, Amelia, till I forget all other themes."

"My dear, dear Alfred!" she replied, "I never knew, I never guessed, how inexpressibly dear you were to my heart, till I became aware that it was possible, oh! more than possible, that I might lose you—that we might be parted, Alfred; parted for ever!"

"Parted, Amelia! Gracious heaven! what do you mean to say to me? Who is there, what is there, then, can part us? The hand

of death may do it; but nothing else can—nothing else, unless it be your own cruel will, Amelia.”

“And my cruel will it never can be, my beloved Alfred!” she replied, in an accent of passionate fondness. “Yet my sinking heart tells me that part we must. It was the pang which this thought brought with it that blanched my cheek and stopped the beating of my heart this morning, Alfred. And had I not struggled against the weakness then, all would now be over between us; but sudden strength seemed given me, that I might conceal that dreadful letter from your parents, till we had laid our heads and hearts together in the hope—alas! in the vain, vain hope, perhaps, that we might together be able to devise some means for escaping the misery of a separation.”

“Escaping it!” exclaimed Alfred, with vehemence. “Who dares to say that there is, that there can be any such danger? Do I not love you, Amelia? And if I do, what but your own will can part us? But keep me no longer in suspense. Where is the

letter? What does it contain, that can threaten the happiness of two beings who love, and who are about to be indissolubly united for life? Show me this bugbear of a letter, Amelia. I do not fear it."

"You shall see it, Alfred; you shall see it, after a short explanation from me. And then—it is from you, dear love, that I must hear my destiny—I will permit no other voice to pronounce it, Alfred."

"Then you are my wife, Amelia!" he rejoined, passionately throwing his arms around her, and pressing her to his bosom. "Keep but your promise of leaving the decision with me, and not all the letters that ever were written can part us."

For one short moment of very touching softness, Miss Thorwold permitted her drooping head to rest upon his shoulder. Then, breathing a heavy sigh, she gently disengaged herself from his arms, and said, with great solemnity and steadiness: "I am to blame, dear Alfred, for thus yielding to weakness, at a moment when strength is very necessary. Now listen to me, my dearest, dearest

friend!—listen to me with your best and coolest judgment, for so only can you help me, if, indeed, help be still possible. That letter, Alfred, is from a London lawyer, threatening me with instant arrest, and an immediate removal to prison, if I do not immediately find the means of paying into his hands the sum of thirteen hundred pounds.”

“Is it a just claim, Amelia?” said the young man, slightly colouring, but not looking by many degrees so much dismayed as he might have done had he possessed about a dozen years’ more experience of the world and its ways.

“I believe it is, dear Alfred,” replied the young lady, considerably comforted by the tone of the inquiry.

“And how was it contracted, my sweet love? And why has not the impertinent fellow sent it to your uncle, instead of audaciously intruding himself upon you here? How was it contracted, Amelia?”

“Therein, my dearest love, lies the difficulty,” she replied. “The large amount will at once show you that it is not likely

to be for any expenses of my own. And indeed, were this possible, which of course it is not, but if this *were* possible, there would be no difficulty in the business whatever, for my uncle, after scolding me a little for my extravagance, perhaps, would pay it instantly, and I should hear no more about it; but, most unhappily, the debt has been incurred for one whom but to name in the presence of Lord Ripley is an offence which he has again and again declared to every body connected with him, that he never will forgive."

"Then how, dearest, have you been led to become responsible for the debts of a person so deeply reprobated by your uncle?"

"Ay, there's the rub, Alfred, and this is the point on which I want to open my heart to you. Lord Ripley, as you well know, has but one legitimate child, the Honourable Mr. Thorwold, his only son and heir. But he has, though few know any thing about it, and nobody ever mentions the subject,—he has, Alfred, a natural daughter, several years older than his son. When my mother, who

survived my poor father but a few years, died, I was taken into the house of my uncle, which has continued to be my home ever since. His establishment consists of two houses, one in London, the other in Cornwall. Of this country-house my uncle used to be passionately fond, and as long as he continued to care about his yacht, he passed all the summer months there, or else on board. But Lady Ripley detested both the house and the yacht, and took especial care to visit neither the one nor the other. Lady Ripley, you know, is no aunt of mine, and as nothing belonging to her lord is particularly dear to her, she never felt any very partial affection for me. The consequence of this was, that I was more at the country-house than the town one, to which arrangement I certainly owe my decided preference for the country. While in Cornwall I formed a strong, alas! a very strong attachment to the natural daughter of my uncle, who certainly was very strongly attached to me also. She constantly resided at her father's house in Cornwall, and she made my life, while I re-

mained there with her, one of unceasing joy, and I might safely say of unceasing improvement too. For she had been most carefully educated, and was never so happy as when instructing me. This happy intercourse continued till I was eighteen, and then, poor dear creature, she married. It is needless for me to enter at length into all the circumstances of this most unhappy marriage. It is enough to say that the man, instead of being, as my uncle supposed, extremely well off, turned out to be little better than a swindler; but his poor wife, who was most devotedly attached to him, never did, nor ever would believe that he was unworthy, and her continued adherence to him so irritated her father, that it ended by a quarrel, which was never made up. Her misery under this, and all her other misfortunes, was more than her health could bear; she fell into a lingering decline, which terminated in her death, and it was during her last illness that this terrible debt was contracted. Her worthless husband had been arrested and dragged to prison, and it

was her dreadful agonies under this infliction which induced me, the very day after I came of age, to put my name to the bill upon which this claim is founded. Now, Alfred, you know all."

"And this all, my dearest life, only adds, if indeed, it were possible, to my devoted, my idolizing affection for you! But why, my beloved, should you suffer this application to alarm your spirits so severely? I cannot doubt that a single word from you to Lord Ripley would induce him to release you from it instantly. You have only to sit down immediately, and write to him, my dearest Amelia, and the disagreeable business will be over. One word will suffice."

"Yes, Alfred," replied Miss Thorwold in the calm accent of despair, "one word *would* suffice. It would suffice to make his stern and steadfast lordship throw me from him for ever, as he did his deserving daughter before. Alas! Alfred, you know him not! Lord Ripley has many high and noble qualities, but he is implacable, and a resolution once taken and avowed, he has never

yet been known to change. He long ago told me that if he ever discovered the slightest disobedience on my part to the injunction he had so solemnly laid upon me, never to hold intercourse with his unfortunate daughter, he would never see, never hold communion with me more."

Alfred looked distressed, and for a minute or two seemed embarrassed how to answer; but at length he said, "If this indeed be so, if this severe opinion of your uncle be just, you must of course apply to my father, my dear Amelia. I can easily imagine, dearest, that the doing so will be disagreeable to you. But I see no alternative."

"Then, Alfred," she replied, clasping her hands, and raising her beautiful eyes to Heaven, as if there only she could look for aid — "then, Alfred, I must prepare my mind for the worst. Nor will I shrink from it, if I can see you, my best-beloved, prepared to meet it also. Alfred! I must go to prison."

"Go to prison, Amelia, in preference to throwing yourself upon the assured kindness

of my excellent father? I cannot, I will not, I do not believe it, Amelia."

"Most sad will be the task of convincing you, dearest, that you are mistaken," she replied, with a look of ineffable tenderness, and with an accent which seemed to announce a resolute submission to suffering, which it was quite heart-breaking to witness in one so gentle-looking, and so beautiful.

"Not only sad, but impossible, my love," replied Alfred, with a tender smile. "I understand you now, my sweet Amelia! You shrink, dearest, from the task of repeating the sad story to him, and it is, therefore, I, my love, who must do it for you."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Amelia, suddenly rising from the sofa, and standing before him with clasped hands, and the most vehement expression of agony on her countenance. "Would you betray me? Have I trusted you for this? Have I opened every throbbing pulse of my breaking heart before your eyes, and do you reward me for this last, best proof of devoted love, by threaten-

ing to disclose to your father a secret upon which more than my life seems to hang?"

Having uttered these words in a voice which trembled, as it seemed, between terror and sorrow, she threw herself upon her knees beside the sofa, and stretching her arms across it, buried her face upon them.

Inexpressibly distressed, Alfred kneeled down beside her, and besought her, in the tenderest accents, not to give way to a degree of vehement despair, which was wholly disproportionate to the evil she feared.

"You must not dress my dear, good, gentle-tempered father in the attributes of your harsh-minded uncle, Amelia. If you will only consent to go up-stairs, and lay down upon the bed for half an hour, I will engage that before we meet again I will have arranged the whole affair to your satisfaction. Will you let me manage it? Will you thus far confide in me?"

"No, sir, I will not," said Amelia, rising from her recumbent position, and standing before him in all the touching severity of

outraged confidence. "I have confided in you!" And here her voice was almost choked with sobs. "I have confided in you, Alfred, with all the undoubting trust of perfect love, and my reward is the being threatened with the repetition of my dreadful tale to the very individual, who, beyond all others in the world, is the very, very last to whom I would disclose it! You have my secret, sir: the fatal words that told it can never be recalled. But think not that I will ever see you more. My resolution is taken. I shall submit myself without one single struggle more to the power of the law. Here is the attorney's letter, Mr. Dermont. Perhaps you may be able to tell me to what prison I shall be conveyed, if the arrest takes place here—No! no! Not here, Alfred! Your father's house shall not be disgraced by me. I will appoint a meeting with this man and his officials, at some lone spot, roofed only by the vault 'of heaven, and be conveyed thence to the sheltering walls which shall henceforth hide me from every eye. They shall not need bars and bolts to keep me! Once entered

there, I will never pass through its gates again alive."

The agony of Alfred was great beyond description, being much increased by perceiving that the eye of Amelia had a wildness of misery in its expression, which seemed to threaten frenzy. But for this, indeed, it is possible, just possible, that the inflated vehemence of her language, and the utter defiance of common sense manifested by her angry refusal of what appeared the only available means of saving her, *might* have suggested the idea of acting; but she was much too accomplished an artist for this. Nothing, indeed, could be more nicely hit off than the degree of unreasonableness which she displayed; for while it saved her from the charge of being sufficiently herself to be quite answerable for all the passionate words she uttered, there was quite enough of reason left to make it very obviously dangerous to irritate her trembling nerves by opposition. To soothe her, therefore, became the first, and almost the only object of her greatly distressed lover. He gently took

her hand, and leading her back to the sofa, and seating her upon it, fell upon his knees before her, and looking at her with eyes which spoke all the fond devotion of his soul, he implored her, by the love she bore him, (poor fellow !) to tell him what she would herself think it would be best for him to do.

This question, and the look of undoubting devotion which accompanied it, appeared to do more towards restoring her tranquillity and self-possession, than any thing he had yet said.

“Heaven bless you, dearest love !” she replied, bending forward, and impressing a kiss upon his forehead. “You must forgive me, my Alfred, if the shock which this letter has given me has proved too much for my firmness. It is not very often, I believe, that I thus permit myself to give way to feeling. No human beings can, in my opinion, really do their duty in life, unless they school themselves into such a degree of firmness as shall enable their mental resources to have fair play in every emergency which may befall them. I am fain to confess, dearest

Alfred, that this has not been the case with me this morning. There was something so new, so entirely unexpected in the direful occurrence,—for I fully believed that my putting my name was little more than a mere form, that my courage, nay, my very intellect seemed to give way under it ! But your affection, your true sympathy, my beloved Alfred, has restored me to myself, and I now feel able to consult with you on what it will be best to do, with something like reason and common sense.—You still, I think, want a month or two of being of age, dear Alfred ?”

“Yes, dearest,” he replied, “I want five months of it ; but were it otherwise, my love, I could not relieve you from this claim without the assistance of my father. Beyond the allowance that he makes me, I have nothing ; and though this allowance is to be augmented to the half of his entire income, from the day when I receive this dear hand, I should fear to engage for the payment of this sum in less than three or four years, my sweet love, lest the doing so might

render necessary a degree of economy which would interfere with your comfort."

"And with yours too, dearest Alfred," she replied, endeavouring so to modulate her voice, as not to betray quite all the satisfaction she felt at having brought matters to so comfortable a tone of consultation. "I should be miserable, my beloved Alfred, were I to witness any privation, on your part, sufficiently severe to be of any real inconvenience. No, dearest! As it is but too evident that the money must be paid directly, it must, of course, be borrowed, Alfred, and my heart assures me, dear love, that the paying interest upon the sum, while gradually paying off the principal by our little domestic savings, will be considered as a work of love, by you, my Alfred, which will have more pleasure than pain in it."

"It most surely would, my sweet Amelia," he returned, while the shadows of an anxious thought or two passed across his features. "It most surely would; but unfortunately, dearest, it is not in the repayment of either interest or principal that the

difficulty lies, but in the act of borrowing. Were I of age, I have no doubt that if we could gain sufficient time to look about a little, this might easily be found upon my covenanting to pay good interest; but, as it is, my signature is, I believe, not worth a shilling."

"I know it, my dear Alfred," said Amelia, briskly, "and my fate is sealed, unless you can apply to some one who would feel your word to be worth more than your bond. None but a true and real friend, who knows you well, Alfred, can be of any use to us at this trying moment. Have you none such?"

"I believe there may be several, Amelia, who would not fear to trust me on my word," he replied; "but all these are my friends only because they are the friends of my father, and, of course, therefore, were I to make this startling application to them, my father would be instantly made acquainted with it. Would it not then be better, my dear love, that he should himself be the person applied to?"

Miss Thorwold knit her brows, and

seemed for a moment in danger of relapsing into an alarming degree of agitation; but she quickly recovered herself, and said in a tone that was almost playful, "Ah! Alfred, I suspect that you are less perfect as a friend, than as a lover. In the latter capacity, I do freely confess that I should not like to see any very material alteration; but were I your friend, Alfred, I should be apt to think that you wanted the perfect confidence which friendship ought to give."

"As how, dearest?" said he.

"As how?" she replied. "What do you imagine dear Julia Drummond would think of you, could she know that much more than the life of the woman you love depended upon your having, for a short time, the use of thirteen hundred pounds, and that you scrupled to ask her to lend it to you?"

"Julia Drummond?" said Alfred colouring violently. "Oh! no. I should not choose to take the money from Julia Drummond."

There was more than one reason why

this answer grated very disagreeably on the ear of Miss Thorwold. There was something in its tone which seemed to say that Julia Drummond was a personage that was to be kept sacred and apart, let what would happen to the rest of the world. There was, moreover, a good deal of decision in the tone, sounding very much as if the gentleman could, upon occasion, even in her presence, have a will of his own. And, worst of all, there was, for the moment at least, an evident forgetfulness of all the woe which threatened the only woman he had any business to care for, in case he did not, by some means or other, obtain possession of thirteen hundred pounds, and lay it at her feet immediately.

For a moment she paused, without making any reply whatever, being doubtful whether she should fall into an hysteric paroxysm of jealous fury, or meekly yield herself to the doom to which he consigned her, and declare herself prepared for an eternal separation and a prison. Miss Thorwold was already

a good deal fatigued, and it might have been for this reason that she decided upon the last.

“Let us quit the subject, Mr. Dermont,” said she; “it is evidently useless to my interest to dwell upon it, and the only possible effect of prolonging this dreadful interview, will be to render me altogether incapable of going with tolerable resolution through the terrific scenes which are before me. For me to know you have the power to save me, and yet that you decline to do it is, after all, perhaps, the best preparation for our parting—the best, or at least the most effectual way of enabling me to bid you an eternal farewell, without sinking under —” but here her voice was suffocated by so passionate a burst of tears, that she threw herself sideways upon the sofa on which she sat, hiding her agitated features upon the cushions. Some accident, as she thus lay prone, and utterly subdued by sorrow, occasioned the comb which fastened her hair, to escape from its office, and the whole of the magnificently beautiful mass fell over her shoulders in dis-

order, and literally swept the ground with its silken tresses.

When gentlemen rising twenty-one are violently in love for the first time in their lives, every new position into which the adored object puts herself is apt to produce a fresh rising and kindling of the flame, like an additional handful of light fuel thrown upon a fire already bright enough. The sight of the beautiful Miss Thorwold in this attitude of woe, enveloped in her silken veil of hair was more than Alfred could stand; and when, in addition to this, he heard the sobs which the thoughts of parting from him drew from her tender bosom, his soul was so completely subdued within him, that he literally had no longer the power of refusing any thing she asked.

"Amelia! Amelia!" he exclaimed, again throwing himself on his knees beside her, "spare me, I beseech you, the agony of seeing you thus sunk in sorrow, and that more bitter still of hearing you talk of our parting, as if it were possible. Amelia! it is not possible! It is not possible that I

should lose you and live. Look up, my love! Let me once again bask in the sunshine of those lovely eyes, and by all my precious hopes of calling you mine I swear, that there is nothing you can ask, which I will not be ready to do. Speak, tell me, explain to me your wishes and your will and I will obey you, let it be what it may that you require. Only let me look again in that sweet face, let me hear you call me your beloved Alfred! Let me hear you promise that you will be mine for ever!"

Thus conjured up, the beautiful creature gently, slowly, coyly stole towards him as he knelt, and having reached his bosom, nestled her head into it, and as if this were not sufficient to subdue him to the most abject slavery, she completed the work by throwing her arms around him. She felt him tremble with emotion as he returned her embrace, and she knew that it was now the time to speak, and settle the business at once.

"My Alfred!" she exclaimed, in the siren sounds of melting tenderness, "my Alfred!

my beloved Alfred! never again let me endure the dreadful anguish of believing that any sentiment exists in your heart stronger than your love for me! Oh, Alfred! How much rather would I die now, believing myself wholly beloved, even as I love you, than linger through long years of life in doubt of it."

"Oh! doubt it not! Doubt it not, my angel love!" he replied, impressing the most impassioned kisses on her lips. "Try me, Amelia! Ask what you will, dictate what you will, and if I refuse to comply, banish me from your presence for ever."

"Then hear me, my affianced husband, hear me," she replied, gently repulsing his caresses, and replacing herself in an attitude better suited for rational conversation, "and think not that I will ask any thing that you can reasonably object to grant. You cannot have forgotten your dear father's gay description of the dignity he had been conferring upon our little friend Julia, as he playfully called her, by giving her to understand, not only that she was now in full pos-

session of her pretty little fortune, but also that she had the power, by a stroke of her pen, of making ducks and drakes of it whenever she liked. Now I am not going to propose that she should make ducks and drakes of it, my Alfred. Heaven forbid! Heartily do I hope that through long years of life you will watch over and protect both her and her fortune. What I do propose is far different. Go to her, Alfred; go to her, my dear husband, and guarding from every earthly ear, and of course from her's, poor dear young thing, among the rest, the name of the woman, whom, though she had the weakness of suffering her affectionate heart to be imposed upon, you still mean to make your wife. Guarding this name with all a husband's tender care, address her frankly with a petition that she would lend you for a few years, on interest, the sum of thirteen hundred pounds. Should she have the childish indiscretion of inquiring for what purpose you want this money, tell her that the time will probably come when you shall no longer wish to conceal this from her, but

that at present it cannot be disclosed; and you may add, Alfred, that your only reason for applying to her, in preference to your father, is your feeling certain that in her case this inquiry would not be persevered in, after your acknowledging that it was painful to you. Will you do this, Alfred, for the love of me?"

A question asked in such a form was not at that moment likely to meet a negative: besides which, Alfred had pledged himself to obey her, by a promise that no degree of averseness to its fulfilment could have tempted him to break. He therefore instantly, and solemnly replied, "Amelia, I will."

"Then lose not an instant," she said, suddenly rising. "Every second is of importance, if you mean to save me from the exposure which I dread so greatly worse than death."

"*If*, Amelia!" he said, in an accent of tender reproach.

"No, no, there is no if, my love!" she rejoined, advancing her beautiful lips to re-

ceive the kiss which was to seal the transaction. But oh! to horse, to horse, my Alfred! Speed, not *if*, but *as* you love me!"

The young man ardently kissed her, once, twice, thrice; and then throwing forward his arm with an action which seemed to promise the speed she asked for, he darted out of the room in silence, in order the more eloquently to prove that he would not allow himself to pause even long enough to say adieu.

Amelia watched him as he went; she watched the door close after him; she listened for, and she heard his rapidly departing steps through the hall, and then she quietly turned to a looking-glass, and put her disordered tresses in order. Having done this, she stretched her arms, and yawned violently, and then, as she walked towards the door, in order to change that apartment for her own, where she might more uninterruptedly resign herself to the perfect repose her exertions both required and merited, she murmured with a languid

smile, "It was rather hard work, to be sure, and yet, had I known when I last visited my rapacious dressmaker, how speedily I should have discovered the means of settling her account, I most certainly would have indulged myself in one or two more of the delicious articles I so vehemently longed for."

CHAPTER VII.

LUCKILY for Alfred the ride from the Mount to the Grange was a very short one, even at an ordinary pace, but, riding as he rode, the ground was passed over before he had time to meditate on what he was about, which, as he was quite determined to do it *bon gré, mal gré*, was fortunate, as it made the entering upon his task a matter of less difficulty than it might otherwise have been. It was not his object to be shown into Mrs. Verepoint's drawing-room, for this would have inflicted upon him the necessity of asking Julia to accompany him into another apartment, an awkwardness which he greatly wished to avoid, and he therefore told the

servant who admitted him, that he wished to see Miss Drummond for a moment, and would be much obliged if she would come down to him.

The man replied by opening the door of the library, saying: "If you will walk in here, sir, I will tell Miss Drummond immediately." But as soon as the door was fairly opened the man perceived that his errand was already done, for there stood Julia alone, busily engaged in seeking a volume which she wanted.

"This is a piece of good luck, Julia," he said, "for I wanted to see you for five minutes alone."

He said this in the easiest and most natural tone possible, and in the easiest and most natural tone possible Julia answered him with a smiling assurance that she was very happy to see him. So far the impetus given him by his scene with Amelia had carried him towards the end he had to reach, and like the gallop of a bold, bad coachman down a hill, sent him for a short distance up the opposite hill, at the same pace. But having proceeded thus far he began to feel,

poor fellow, that it was indeed a very uphill path he had to go, and though he did not actually jib, he stopped.

“ Well! Alfred,” said Julia, who rightly divined that whatever he had to tell her must be about Amelia, “ well, what is it you have to tell me?”

“ To tell you, Julia?” he replied, with a heavy sigh. “ No, I do not come to tell you any thing, I come to perform a very painful, nay, I must confess it, a very difficult task; I come to ask a favour of you.”

“ And is that a painful and a difficult task, my dear Alfred? I do not think it could be any thing but a pleasure to me to grant any thing you could ask, but your telling me that the asking it is a pain, is enough to destroy the pleasure, if any thing could,” replied Julia, fixing her eyes upon the open volume she held in her hand, that he might not see the tears which she felt were filling her eyes.

“ God bless you, my dear and ever-kind friend,” said he, desperately determined to say what he had to say before she should speak again, for there was something so

sweetly confiding in her voice and look, that he dreaded the telling her that she must ask no questions, still more than asking her to begin the duck and drake process upon her little fortune; "God bless you, Julia! I know I am a fool for dreading to tell a friend so every way indulgent, that I want her to lend me some money."

"Lend you money, my dearest Alfred!" she replied, looking and feeling inexpressibly delighted, "how very glad I am to hear it! I have at this very moment in my writing desk at home more money than I have any idea what to do with. You may take it all, and welcome. Here is the key of the desk," she added, disengaging a little key that was fastened to her watch-chain," and you may keep it till I come home again; I really never thought that the having money could give me so much pleasure."

The face of poor Alfred became as red as scarlet. "My dear, dear Julia!" he replied, "can you not now conceive it must be painful to me to tell you, that no sum you can by possibility have in your desk can be sufficient

for what I want? Julia! I have immediate need, most urgent need of thirteen hundred pounds."

It was now Julia's turn to colour, and she did so very beautifully, but it was wholly and solely because by talking of the money she had in her desk, she had given Alfred the pain of declaring that it was not enough; but the charming simplicity and unbounded confidence of her manner soon set it all right again.

"What a fool I am!" she exclaimed, "but you must excuse me, dearest Alfred; I know so little, so absolutely nothing about money, that a very little seems to me enough for every thing. I really am quite ashamed of myself, as if it could be worth while for you to ask for what my guardian gave for my little wants and wishes. Thank goodness however, there is no time lost by my blundering, for you have only to give my love to my guardian and tell him, that he is to let you have out of my money exactly as much as you want, and that he must do it in the

quick way he told me of, this very day, without losing a post."

"But my father can no longer regulate the disposal of your money, Julia," replied Alfred, in a faltering voice; "as you are now of age, it is only your own signature that can avail."

"But what am I to sign, Alfred?—Oh! I remember now all about the power of attorney. How in the world can I manage to get such a thing? I don't even know very well what it is. And it is so vexing, Alfred, if you want it directly, that so much time must be lost! Gallop home as fast as ever you can, and ask your father to write to old Mr. Wood; that is the person he told me must do it, and he may send me the letter, if it is proper for me to sign it, or I will walk home across the fields to sign it there, if you think it will be the quickest way. Say, Alfred, shall I set off directly?"

Poor Alfred! Notwithstanding all this eager kindness, the worst part of his task still remained undone. He felt that it must be so much easier for Julia to comprehend

that he might want money, than that he should want it secretly! But she must be made to understand this, or all he had yet done would be greatly worse than useless.

“No, Julia, no,” he said. “It is not only yourself who must sign this letter to the broker, requesting him to send you a power of attorney, but you must also write it yourself. In short, my dearest Julia, my father must never, *never* know it.”

The bright glow of affectionate pleasure, which had lighted up her countenance, faded at once. “Oh! Alfred!” she exclaimed, “what a pity! He is so very, very kind! And he does love you so very, very dearly! Think better of it, my dearest Alfred—think how very impossible it is that he should be angry with you. Do you not feel that it is impossible?”

This was an appeal that he found it very difficult to answer. Painful as he had felt it must be to ask her for this money, without telling her why he wanted it, he had not anticipated any difficulty from it, for he felt perfectly sure that her delicacy of character

would prevent her appearing at all desirous of knowing more than he should tell her ; but he had not foreseen the embarrassment which now beset him, and yet it was the most natural thing in the world that Julia should exert her very utmost power to prevent his doing any thing that could be construed into ingratitude to his indulgent father. He knew not how to answer her, and having pulled out his pocket-handkerchief three times, and walked up and down the room twice, he suddenly placed himself before her, and said, “ Julia ! spare me on this point, I conjure you. Indeed, I am not so much to blame as you think me. I have no power, no right.” He stopped short, feeling that this line of defence might lead him a great deal further than he intended to go.

But he had already gone far enough. Julia made no further remonstrance, and merely said: “ Of course, Alfred, I do not mean to dictate to you. Just tell me the words I ought to write, and it shall be done directly.”

Had Alfred been aware how perfectly

certain Julia felt that he was borrowing her money for the use of Miss Thorwold, he might not have been able so honestly to assure that young lady, upon his return, that he had managed the affair most successfully and completely according to her instructions, as he did. Both his words and manner were, however, perfectly satisfactory to her. So was the celerity with which the business was brought to a conclusion; and the lawyer's receipt for the various sums he had undertaken to collect, lodged in her writing-desk; and this great and ever-harassing danger passed and over, she shook her ambrosial locks, clapped her triumphant hands together in private, and thanked her beauty, her talents, and her good star.

There certainly did appear at this juncture, to be a tide in the affairs of Miss Thorwold; and that it was at the flood, leading her on at a most satisfactory rate to the fortune she had assigned for herself, could hardly be doubted; for the very next morning, after the conclusion of the borrowing and paying transaction, a large brown-paper

parcel, directed to Colonel Dermont, arrived by the mail, which, on being opened, was found to contain the impatiently awaited settlements, all fairly engrossed and ready for signing.

Alfred's delight as he saw them, seized upon them, and held them in his eager grasp, had certainly a good deal of boyish glee in it, and the fair and wise Amelia turned away her beautiful head, that the amusement which the ecstasies of her young lover occasioned her might not be perceived.

All now was joyous bustle and confusion at the Mount. Measures had long ago been taken for the immediate solemnisation of the marriage, as soon as these necessary and important documents should arrive ; and little, therefore, save the actual preparation of the wedding banquet, and the announcing to the guests who had promised to be present at it, that the day was at length fixed, remained to be done. The marriage of Colonel Dermont's heir, however, was not an event to be performed in private. As large a party of their more intimate neighbours were in-

vited as could be conveniently accommodated, the more distant guests being, on this great and joyful occasion, contented, nay, delighted, whether ladies or gentlemen, married or single, to be lodged in best rooms or bachelors' rooms, as the chance might be, and feeling superlatively happy and flattered, if they could only be lodged at all.

Some few near neighbours, indeed, who were sufficiently intimate to be permitted to assist on the joyful occasion, offered rooms in their houses for the distant guests, and this was a great accommodation.

Mrs. Knight was, of course, one of the first to volunteer her services; and not only Lord Ripley, but one or two other dear fashionable friends of the bride, and among the rest her two bridemaids, were to be received at Crosby, and make their full-dressed appearance at the Mount, at an early hour on the morning of the happy day. Mrs. Verepoint, too, thoughtfully suggested that Miss Drummond's room might be very useful, and therefore strongly urged her new fa-

vourite, Julia, to remain at the Grange till after the wedding party had dispersed; attending the ceremony, and the banquet which was to follow it, with them.

Julia, who would have joyfully lodged herself during the whole affair in the very darkest dungeon that ever was formed, so that she might have escaped being its witness, very gratefully accepted the prolonged invitation; and as no one at the Mount made any objection to it, the matter was speedily settled.

Some discussion, but of the most friendly kind, arose respecting the scene of the nuptial festivities; Mrs. Knight pleading for her right to act in *loco parentis* to the bride, but permitting this right to be set aside, in compliance with the earnest entreaties of Colonel and Mrs. Drummond. In short, every thing went on in the most agreeable manner possible. The very finest breakfast that ever was given was in preparation; grapes and pines were to be as plenty as gooseberries and currants at a summer fair; grouse was

to fly to them with railroad speed from Scotland, and every covert in the county held itself honoured by being permitted to contribute its contingent of pheasants and partridges. Gunter's idle autumn stoves were put into active service; and as to flowers, whole acres might have been thickly strewn with the blossoms of rare beauty, which were carefully watched and kept in readiness for this great occasion.

There was but one single circumstance which occurred during this last week of joyous preparation, which had any tendency to check the general joy; and even this was not suffered to affect more than two individuals, all mention of it being carefully avoided by those two, excepting between themselves, in order to prevent any vexatious thought of any kind from sullyng the brightness of the general joy.

The day after the arrival of the marriage settlements, another despatch from his lawyer was delivered to Colonel Dermont at the breakfast-table, the perusal of which seemed to give him much satisfaction.

"Any commands for the Grange, Mrs. Dermont?" said he. "I am going to ride over immediately after breakfast."

"Yes, indeed, colonel, I have commands," replied Mrs. Dermont, "and very glad I shall be to escape the inconvenience of sending on purpose. You must be sure to see Julia, if you please, and tell her, with my love, that she must send me over Susan directly. She has not been very long used to her services, you know, and therefore I don't suppose she will want her much for the next day or two. And tell her to let her come directly, for the job I want her for must be done at once."

Colonel Dermont replied that he should be sure to see Julia, and would not fail to deliver the message immediately.

Julia indeed was the only person he wished to see on the present occasion, as he had matters of real business to speak of, and he therefore only inquired for her.

"Both the young ladies are in the garden, colonel," answered the man.

"Then go there after them, Richard, and

tell Miss Drummond that I wish to speak to her for five minutes in the library."

The message was delivered, and the summons obeyed without loss of time, and the colonel proved himself a trusty messenger, by executing his lady's errand, before he attended to his own.

"I shall be delighted if she can be useful," said Julia, eagerly, "and I will go out and send her off directly, sir, if you will give me leave?"

"Do so, my dear, and then our consciences will be at rest in that matter. But come back to me as soon as you can."

In a few minutes Julia returned with the satisfactory intelligence that Susan was already on her way, and Colonel Dermont then opened the weightier business which brought him there, by saying, "Now, Julia, I am going to prove to you that coming of age is really a serious affair, when the possession of money comes with it, and that it will be necessary that you should attend to me very seriously, in order that you should perfectly understand what I am going to say to you."

Julia coloured, as she recollected how very little she had understood of the last business which her coming of age had brought upon her, but she answered with a smile, that she would try to be as little stupid as she possibly could.

“ Well, my dear, I think that may do,” replied her indulgent friend. “ You remember, I hope, all I said to you when we settled our accounts together, about my being sorry that the interest you got from your money was so small, and that I hoped that I should be able to put you in the way of making it better. Do you remember all this, my dear?”

“ Yes, sir,” replied Julia, in rather a faint voice. “ Yes, sir, I do.”

“ Well then, my dear, what I come for now, is to tell you that my good friend Wright has managed the business admirably for us. He has got a mortgage with a security as firm as a freehold can make it. You are to have five per cent. for your money, Julia, which will make a very great difference in your little income, and you are to

receive the interest half-yearly. Wright will receive it for you, so you will have no trouble or difficulty whatever, my dear. There was one trifling obstacle, but Wright, like a sensible fellow as he is, got over that at once, without running the risk of losing such a capital good thing by waiting till he could apply to me. This difficulty was that the money required was just three hundred pounds more than you have got, Julia. That is to say that the sum wanted was eleven thousand, and you have got you know, with all my savings, only ten thousand seven hundred; but old Wright knew that I should be able and willing to lend you the odd three hundred, my dear, and so he settled the business at once—and now all you have got to do is to sign this power of attorney which he has sent down, and when you have done so, I will forward it to Mr. Wood, my broker, who will sell the money out, and place it in the hands of Mr. Wright. Here is a pen and ink, Julia—and here is where you are to put your name.”

Julia heard and understood every word

he said, nevertheless she had been earnestly pondering in her mind during the greater part of the time he had been speaking, what would be the best way of informing this kindly active friend that she had already put it out of her own power to act as he advised her to do.

“ I have two things to attend to,” thought Julia, with a degree of clearness which really did her credit, considering how violently her heart was beating. “ The first is to confess that I am no longer possessed of ten thousand seven hundred pounds, and the next is to refuse to tell him what I have done with the deficiency.” Both tasks were difficult and disagreeable, but the necessity of the case gave her firmness, and gently putting aside the pen which he held ready for her, she said, “ I fear you will be very angry with me, Colonel Dermont, but I am no longer in possession of the sum you made over to me. I have already spent thirteen hundred pounds of it.”

“ Spent thirteen hundred pounds in less than three weeks, Miss Julia Drummond?”

cried the colonel, staring at her with more incredulity than anger. "You really must excuse me, young lady, if I confess that I don't believe a word of it. You are either making a joke, you foolish child, or else you have some very dangerous notion in your thoughts, that makes you prefer keeping the ready money in your own hands. Tell me the truth at once, Julia?"

"The truth will, I well know, make you very angry, dear sir. I have lent the money to a friend, and I have pledged my solemn promise not to disclose the transaction to you."

"Not to disclose the transaction to me!" repeated the colonel. "And who can the precious scoundrel be who made this a condition with you? And were you, and are you, such a perfect idiot, Julia, as not to perceive that this condition alone stamps your friend as a villain? Answer this question honestly—does not this desire to separate you from the protection of the only friend you have in the world, prove him to be a villain?"

“ Oh ! no, no, no,” replied Julia, bursting into tears, and wounded to the very soul at hearing such a judgment (apparently, too, so just) passed upon the conduct of Alfred; “ no, sir, no, he is not a villain.”

Colonel Dermont looked earnestly in her face for a minute or two, and then said, sighing deeply, “ Oh ! Julia, Julia ! this mystery most unhappily clears up another. It is now only too easy for me to understand why it was you refused, with such strange and vehement precipitation, the proposal of Mr. Borrowdale. It is but too plain that, young as you are, your affections have been seduced by some unworthy wretch, who dares not avow himself to your friends. Have pity upon yourself, my poor child !—for your own sake, Julia, stop short in this dreadful, this disgraceful career. My poor, dear girl, you are in the high road to destruction ; and though your grandfather saved my life, Julia, you won’t let me do any thing to save you.”

Tears stood in the good colonel’s eyes as he said this; and there was so much more

of sorrow than of anger in his manner, that the unfortunate girl was deeply affected, and wept bitterly.

“No wonder you weep, Julia,” said he, “and I would that I knew how to save you from yourself; but I am at a loss, quite at a loss, my poor child. If I could form any guess as to who the villain is that has thus beguiled you! It is as clear to me as that the sun gives light, that the same sentiment which made you refuse Borrowdale, made you thus madly give away your property to one whose name you dare not mention; but who this can be—who it is possible you can have seen and known, thus secretly, it is quite beyond my power to imagine.”

“You are wrong, sir; you are mistaken!—indeed, indeed, you are!” cried poor Julia, inexpressibly shocked at the idea of her having a secret lover.

“Then answer me one question, Julia; and if you will, I will say no more, but only endeavour, if you will let me, to settle your remaining money in some way or other, that may prevent your being thus scandalously

robbed for the future. Only tell me, upon the honour of your father's child, that the person to whom you have lent this money is not one on whom you have bestowed the affections of your heart."

Julia closed her eyes that she might not meet the inquiring look that was fixed upon her face, her face burning, as she felt, with crimson blushes, and then she covered it with both her hands. But she did not speak. So conjured, she could not have uttered a falsehood had instant death been the consequence of her abstaining from it, and there she sat, poor little girl, convicted, clearly convicted, of having bestowed a large sum of money upon a lover, within a very few days of being in possession of it!

Colonel Dermont was as much grieved and shocked as it was well possible for a gentleman to be. But there was one feeling paramount above all others, and this, under the circumstances, was rather a whimsical one. It occurred to him, good conscientious man, that his first duty, after making this most painful discovery, must be

to take measures for preventing the lovely, high-born wife of his son from being disgraced and contaminated by any intimate association with a young female who had so shamefully misconducted herself. After reflecting upon this really difficult point for a minute or two, during which the sight of Julia's tears trickling through her fingers touched his heart, without softening the severity of his judgment, he said, "It has been settled amongst us, Julia Drummond, that our dear son and his charming wife should take up their residence at the Mount for as long a time as they shall find it agreeable to them. This being the case I will not conceal from you the fact that I should wish you, if you please, to accept that old lady's invitation—your mother's aunt, you know, who has written two or three times to Mrs. Dermont, as of course you remember, saying that when we could spare you she should like your company. Hitherto we have put it off, and put it off, because we did *not* quite like to lose your company; and Alfred, you know, was always against

your going. But now it seems to me, I own, that the case is different. I don't wish to be severe. I *won't* be severe, Julia Drummond; for the sake of those who are dead and gone. I *won't* be severe; but ask who you will, and I believe they will tell you that it is my duty to prevent your being over intimate with my daughter-in-law. For a young lady, Miss Drummond, to have a secret lover, whose name she will not mention, is bad enough, disgraceful enough, fully to justify what I am now saying to you. That a young lady of your age should draw out thirteen hundred pounds of her fortune, and that too, for a person whose name she declines to mention, is also enough to justify the father-in-law of such a person as Miss Thorwold, in taking measures to prevent any great intimacy between her and the mysterious young lady in question. But when these two things are joined together, I think I may leave it to yourself to decide, whether Mrs. Alfred Dermont and this young person, ought to be members of the same family."

During the whole of this long speech Julia continued to conceal her face with her hands, but when it appeared to have reached its conclusion, she changed her attitude, wiped the tears from her eyes, and replied, in a very gentle but tolerably firm voice, that she would write to her aunt M'Kensie by that day's post.

In a general way Colonel Dermont was not in the habit of endeavouring to find out more than met the ear in what was said to him; but the tone of Julia puzzled him. There was something in it which made him think his proposal for turning her out of his house was rather agreeable to her than otherwise, and he remained looking at her in silence for a minute or two.

There was nothing in her countenance, however, though it still bore traces of tears, which at all tended to lessen this impression, and the idea that she positively liked to be sent off in disgrace from the Mount, and all its delights, in order to become the inmate of an old lady's house in the Highlands, struck him as being so perfectly unnatural as to re-

quire some very strong reasons to account for it. He was not in a state of mind to make the discovery of these reasons a matter of much difficulty. That Julia rejoiced at escaping from his watchful eye, in order to carry on her mysterious and disgraceful intercourse with her unknown lover, appeared to him a matter of such unquestionable certainty, that he would really have been ashamed of himself could he have doubted it for a moment. He rose from his chair, and gravely extending his hand, said, "This is to me a very painful moment, Julia Drummond. That it is otherwise to you ought to prevent the sorrow I feel from being lasting. Farewell! May you awaken to a consciousness of the danger of the course you are in, before it is too late to save yourself from utter destruction. Farewell."

Julia repeated the word, but not very steadily; neither, with all her efforts, could she prevent a fresh gush of tears from flowing down her cheeks as she raised her eyes to take a last look at her guardian.

Colonel Dermont was touched in despite

of what he believed to be his duty, and turning suddenly round after he had laid his hand upon the lock of the door, he said, "Julia! Tell me the villain's name, only tell me his name, and I will do any thing rather than part with you." But Julia shook her head, and firmly pronouncing the word "Impossible!" turned away and walked towards the window.

Before she had reached it the door was opened and closed again, and Julia Drummond was alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL DERMONT's ride back to the Mount was a very melancholy one. He was essentially a very kind-hearted man, and really had loved the unfortunate Julia Drummond as well as it was possible for a human being, absorbed as he was by his affection for Alfred, to love any body else. He had been kind to her, uniformly kind to her, and their union had, up to this unhappy day, been one of affectionate and unbroken harmony. The change which had now taken place was too violent to be met without deep pain, and except, perhaps, at the moment when he hung over the death-bed of the offender's gallant grandfather, he had never felt so thoroughly

unhappy in his life. But the colonel was not only a kind-hearted, he was also a conscientious man, and he found his best consolation in believing that by guarding the beloved wife of his son from the contamination of Julia's society, he had been strictly doing his duty.

The first person he met on entering his house was Alfred. The happy, gay-hearted, triumphant Alfred, who had passed the interval of his absence tête-à-tête with Amelia in the library; that fair creature having indulged him in that way rather longer than usual, for the purpose of impressing upon his mind that the only reason which could rationally induce two gay young people, like themselves, to consent to the scheme of residing with the old people during a part of the year, was that they might spend the whole of the income allowed them in London during the other part.

But Amelia, having obtained his deeply-pledged assurance, that from the hour she became his wife, her will should rule him in all things, had dismissed him, having, as she

said, a great many little preparations about her wedding-dress to look after and superintend. This was, perhaps, the only excuse she could have found for getting away from him, which would have left him gay. But gay he now was, and gaily he stepped forward to meet his father.

“Good Heaven! my dear sir, what is the matter?” exclaimed Alfred, immediately struck by the melancholy aspect of the colonel. “You have heard some bad news I am certain. Is it any thing about Amelia? Any thing to postpone our wedding-day?”

“No, my dear boy, no!” replied the colonel; “nothing that you, I suppose, would think so bad as that. But, nevertheless, Alfred, I have learnt something which grieves me to the heart. Come to the library with me, and I will tell you all that I know about it; and it is just possible, I think, that your young wits being sharper than mine, and your eyes too, perhaps you may be able to give me a hint upon a subject that is to me a complete mystery.” Knowing that his Amelia was in the act of pre-

paring her wedding-dress, and being determined not to interrupt such an almost sacred occupation, he followed his father without opposition, though greatly too much preoccupied to feel much interest in his mystery.

"Alfred!" said the colonel, as soon as they had both seated themselves, "I have found out one mystery, though I have fallen upon another. I have found out why Julia Drummond refused Mr. Borrowdale."

"Really, sir, I don't think there was any great mystery in that," replied Alfred. "She refused him because she did not like him."

"Good. But why did she not like him, Alfred?" returned the colonel. "How was it possible that any young girl could help liking him—unless, Alfred, unless she liked another better?"

What thought it was which flashed through the young man's brain as he listened to these words, it is not easy to say. It might be that he was disagreeably surprised to hear it stated that his dear friend Julia was suspected of having a secret attachment

to any man; or it might be that he feared he was going to be told that it was suspected she was attached to himself. Whatever might be the cause, he certainly changed colour, and answered, with some slight embarrassment, "I hope not, sir."

"It is past hoping; I am sorry to say that it is past hoping, Alfred. As far as being attached to another man, she has confessed it, Alfred."

"You must excuse me for saying, my dear sir, that I think it is equally useless and unkind to urge Julia upon such a subject as this," replied Alfred, with heightened colour, and a look of considerable displeasure on his brow. "We have no right of any kind to urge her to marry a man she does not like, and still less, if possible, to insist upon her declaring her reasons for refusing him."

"My dear Alfred, you mistake me altogether. I never urged her to do any such thing. This was merely an accidental inference, as you will perceive, if you will listen to me, for a moment, patiently."

Colonel Dermont then related the steps he

had taken in order to obtain for Julia a more profitable investment of her money than the English funds, and the success which had attended those efforts. He then went on to describe the interview he had just had with her, stating very fairly all that had been said on both sides.

The feelings with which Alfred listened to this narrative, were decidedly the most painful he had ever experienced. That the generous act of Julia, and the greatly more generous silence with which she had endured an accusation so foreign to her nature, so degrading, so indelicate, should bring upon her the disgraceful sentence of banishment which his father confessed he had pronounced; and that too, for the sake of saving Amelia, the deeply indebted Amelia, from the contamination of her presence, was more than he could bear, and feeling beyond the possibility of doubt that Amelia's feelings upon the subject must be the same as his own, and yielding to this persuasion, as well as to the natural impetuosity of his nature, he laid his hand

upon the arm of his father, and sternly exclaimed.

“Now, sir, hear me ! And never again, while you live, suffer appearances, however strong, to wipe from your mind the record of a life as faultless, and as pure as that of Julia.”

He then related the whole affair exactly as it had passed, taking care to make Amelia's part of it appear what, indeed, he truly considered it to be, a shining proof of her generous, and confiding temper.

Never perhaps did any man look, or feel more ashamed of himself than did Colonel Dermont as he listened to this straightforward narrative.

“Reproach me, Alfred, reproach me as much as you will,” he exclaimed, “it is impossible you can reproach me too much. That I should be such a fool, such an idiot, as to believe that such a dear innocent young creature could have picked up a vagabond of a lover, and sold her money out of the stocks for him ! No, I shall never forgive myself — never, never.”

“Let us be thankful, father,” said Alfred, “that no worse mischief has been yet done than the paining her dear, gentle heart for an hour or two. Would it tire you, sir, to ride over to the Grange again, to tell her that you have heard the whole story from me? I would willingly go myself, but she certainly does deserve an apology that none but yourself can offer?”

“God bless her! She does indeed, poor child, and she shall have it, Alfred, as fully as it is in my power to speak it. I shall be ashamed to look at her, but I do not mean to shrink from it, I promise you. There is the bell for luncheon. I will just take a glass of wine, and a crust of bread, while they put the saddle on again, and will be off directly. Poor, dear little soul! How the tears did run down between her fingers, to be sure! And she never uttered a single word of reproach, but gave me such a kind and loving look, just at the very last—just as she turned away from me! But God bless me, Alfred,” he continued, stopping short in his progress towards the dining-room, to which they were approaching

arm in arm, "what could she mean when my heart softened towards her, and I came back from the door and said, 'Only tell me, upon the honour of your father's child.'—Now mind, Alfred, I am repeating the exact words,—'Only tell me, on the honour of your father's child, that the person to whom you have lent this money is not one on whom you have bestowed your affections;' those are the words I said, and how do you think she answered them? Would you not have thought that she might straightforward have answered, No? But not a bit of it. She did not say *yes*, to be sure, but she made me understand that she meant yes, as plainly every bit as if she had, for she covered up her blushing face with both her hands, and did not speak a single word. What could I take this for but a confession? But there, again, you see I was mistaken. But what in the world could she mean by it?"

"Depend upon it, sir, she meant nothing of the kind. The whole interview, as you have described it, must have been terribly painful to her, and the hiding her face was

very natural," said Alfred; feeling, perhaps, at that moment as if he should have very well liked to hide his own.

"I suppose so," said the old gentleman, with a penitent sigh, and, without saying any more about it, he continued his progress into the dining-room.

In justice to the modesty of Alfred it must be here observed that the emotion he betrayed at hearing words likely to suggest the idea that Julia loved him—rather more than was necessary for an adopted sister—did not arise from any vain ideas of his own. But on this subject his eyes had been very unpleasantly opened by the fair Amelia.

When, after the borrowing scene with her in Mrs. Verepoint's library, he had recounted the particulars of Julia's behaviour to the lady of his love, the recapitulation of her looks and words affected him so strongly that his eyes filled with tears. Had the beautiful Amelia loved Alfred Dermont, she might, perhaps, have felt jealous at this proof of tender sensibility; but, as it was, she was only piqued, and said, with a meaning laugh, "You are not quite aware, I suspect, of the

tender flame you have kindled in that quarter. Take my word for it, Alfred, this money would never have been lent had Julia not been in love with you."

If it had been possible for Alfred to have been angry with Miss Thorwold he would have been so then; and, perhaps, she perceived the contingent possibility, for she said, in a manner that she well knew was irresistible, "Ah, Alfred, you know the old proverb—'set a thief,' and so on. You must not look gravely at me. Had I not loved you so very well myself, I might not have fancied symptoms of the same weakness in another."

Need it be said that Amelia was forgiven?

While these various scenes were going on, with more or less of gravity and even of suffering, among the gentlemen and ladies of our tale, the individuals in the humbler offices were as busy as so many bees, working very hard, it is true, but amidst shouts of light and lively laughter, and with spirits luxuriating in the sort of bustle, and with the sort of anticipation that they loved the best.

The arrival amongst them of Susan was

the signal for fresh jocularities, for her delight in her new appointment was so great as to render every look a smile, and every labour an amusement, and gaily indeed did her tongue run when, after receiving her instructions from Mrs. Dermont, she entered upon her task of sewing fringe upon window curtains amidst the other elegant labours going on in the housekeeper's room.

"But I think it is very hard though," said Susan, "that of all the servants in the house, kitchen-maid, and stable-boy into the bargain, I am the only one who has never seen the beautiful bride."

"Then why did your young lady take herself off so?" replied another of the party, raising her eyes from the wreath of paste she was preparing for the sides of a game patée.

"Nay, Susan, for that matter," resumed a third, "you might see her easy enough this very minute if you will, for I seed her not a minute ago coming along the passage up stairs to her own room. As she never set eyes upon you before, she won't know but what you may be one of the housemaids,

come to see if her water jugs is filled up. You have got nothing to do but just to take yonder green can in your hand and walk in, and have a good stare at her. Her room is the pink room, you know."

Susan yielded to the temptation, casting a deprecating look at the housekeeper, she carefully arranged her work upon her chair, seized upon the water can, and straightway mounted the stairs. In less time than could have been expected her returning steps were heard, and more than one tongue was preparing to inquire what she thought of the beauty, when she re-entered the room, with tottering steps, and a face as pale as ashes.

"Mercy on me, Susan ! what is the matter with you ? Why you look as if you had seen a ghost instead of a bride," said one of the women, staring at her.

"You don't mean to tell me," said Susan, seating herself, as it seemed, because she was unable to stand, "you don't mean to tell me that the person, the lady, that is at this moment up in the pink room is going to be married to our Mr. Alfred?"

“Don’t I though?” returned the worker in paste. “Isn’t she beautiful enough for your taste, Miss Jenkins? At any rate, if you have taken any objection, I would advise you as a friend, not to let Mr. Alfred know it, for I can tell you that it is likely enough he would put you in the first frying pan he could catch, and never spare grease till you were done to his liking.”

Susan evidently neither listened to, nor heard, a single word of this tirade, but after sitting perfectly still for a minute or two she rose up, walked to the corner where spring water was conveyed into the room, and having seized upon a basin which stood on the table under it, drew sufficient for a copious draught, and swallowed it.

“I will speak to her if I die for it,” said she, turning towards the door; “it is possible I may be mistaken, but I will soon know;” and though more than one voice was raised to stop her, she heeded them not, but mounted with a resolute step the flight of back stairs which led to the best bed-rooms. It is scarcely necessary to tell the intelligent reader that

Susan Jenkins was the same Susan who had waited upon Miss Thorwold at Mrs. Stedworth's lodgings in Half-Moon-street; neither can it be necessary to add, that the being assured that the heir of the Mount was about to unite himself in holy matrimony to that beautiful young lady, caused her to feel rather faint and uncomfortable.

Susan Jenkins, as we have said, walked up the back stairs with a resolute step, but it was also a slow one. The girl was a good girl, and she was moreover a grateful and attached dependant upon the Dermont family; for which reasons, though she was both young and ignorant, she had decidedly made up her mind to prevent, by some means or other, espousals which appeared to her so very particularly objectionable. But how to manage it she did not exactly know. In the first place, however, she very properly determined to give the young lady the benefit of such doubts respecting her identity, as fairly arose from the shortness of the glance which she had given her, a glance too, which had not been reciprocal, for the young lady

had been engaged in the examination of a beautiful wreath of orange blossoms when she entered the room with her can, and, not having raised her eyes, had certainly left one very important feature unscrutinised by her humble acquaintance.

It was quite right, therefore, that Susan should make herself still more certain of the identity than she felt already, before she took any steps towards making other people as well acquainted with the young lady as she was herself. This, however, was but a trifling part of the business which she had in hand. She was quite aware that she might have difficulties to encounter in proving the assertions she was determined to make ; Miss Thorwold might deny the identity ; she might declare that she had never beheld Susan before, and that her strange and most improbable statements must have arisen from mistake.

“ In that case,” thought Susan, “ I must make the colonel go up to London himself to see that wicked woman, Mrs. Stedworth, and get the truth out of her ;” but her next

thought made the last one pretty nearly valueless, for did not Susan know that the getting truth from Mrs. Stedworth would, in all moral probability, prove impossible? Her purpose, however, was not to be abandoned because it was difficult, and muttering as she went, that a faint heart never could get rid of a fair lady any more than it could win her, she boldly stepped forward, opened the door, and stood in the presence of the beauty.

As she entered the room this time with less of civil, housemaid-quietness than before, Miss Thorwold raised her eyes to challenge the business of the intruder, and then, if any doubts did rest on the mind of Susan respecting her being the same beautiful young lady whose fine long hair she had brushed in Half-Moon-street, they were now removed. It was impossible to have seen Amelia Thorwold and her fine hair so recently, and not to remember her.

The glance which the beauty now encountered from the honest eye of Susan, was neither transitory nor timid. On the contrary, it was steady, fixed, and very intel-

ligent. If it were possible to take the liberty of pitying so very beautiful and every way distinguished a young lady as Miss Thorwold, she might have been pitied then. Susan did not recognise her with at all more certainty than she recognised Susan, and the effect upon her mind was not much unlike that which quick and violent poison might have produced upon her body. Her nerves seemed to wither as she looked at her.

It was with great and extraordinary rapidity that, after the first gasp was over, a variety of schemes shot through the unfortunate Amelia's brain, all of them having for their object the rendering the evidence of this unexpected witness against her, of non-effect. She remembered, with a sort of convulsive joy, how well she had warded off the equally pressing danger with which the lawyer's letter had threatened her, and remembering also with desperate vividness, that she must be true to herself now or fall for ever, she drew a long breath which seemed to string her nerves anew, and re-

turning the earnest gaze of Susan, she said, with great solemnity, and in a style to make the humble aspirant to the honour of exposing truth to the light of day, pretty clearly understand what she would have to encounter if she persevered in the attempt.

“Is it possible, young woman, that after the disgraceful, but perfectly just manner in which I saw you dismissed from the service of Mrs. Stedworth, you can dare to have introduced yourself as a servant in such a family as this? Believe me, you are very ill advised. You must be aware that it is quite impossible any statements of yours can be listened to in contradiction to what I must feel it my duty to say respecting you. Do not flatter yourself, young woman, that any lies and improbable histories which you may attempt to tell, will save you from the most ignominious expulsion from the house. Far from saving you, indeed, such statements will most likely lodge you in a gaol. But I pity you, Susan, I pity your youth, and I pity you for the dreadful scrape that you seem likely to fall into, and I am willing,

from remembering the civility with which you waited upon me in London, to stretch forth a friendly hand to help you. Take my advice, Susan. Leave your place instantly upon any excuse you like. Here are ten sovereigns (a part of Lord Ripley's wedding present). Let these convey you to London. When they are gone you may apply to me for more. I pity you, Susan, and shall always be ready to help you, provided, of course, that you conduct yourself properly, and never suffer your lips to utter what it will be for ever impossible for you to prove."

Susan Jenkins stood listening to her in perfect stillness till she had finished, and then, without saying a single word in reply, or appearing at all conscious that money had been offered to her, she turned round and walked out of the room.

The sensations of Miss Thorwold were not agreeable. It was not difficult to interpret the silence of Susan. Had the money been only promised, and not offered, it might, perhaps, have been inferred that the

silence which was to ensure reward was thus promised, as it were, by a symbol. But the utter contempt of a bribe, which seemed to be inferred by the manner in which the offer of the money had been received, told a different tale, and Amelia perceived at once that the only chance left her, lay in the hope that her statement as to the nature of their former acquaintance might be received in preference to that of Susan.

It was at this moment that the bell rang for luncheon, and the start which Amelia gave on hearing it, proved that the courage she was struggling to call to her assistance, was not yet come. "They will not be greatly surprised at my absence, for I never obey the bell immediately. And they will not send to me directly, for they have left it off since they were desired not to mind my being late. A few minutes, very few minutes, will suffice to prepare me for it all."

It was thus that the unhappy beauty communed with herself as she bathed her temples, her forehead, almost her whole head in eau de Cologne. And by degrees,

she felt her courage return; the act of feigning was too familiar to her, for the necessity of resorting to it to affect her very painfully. She knew that her powers in that line were very considerable, and trusting to them, and to the sharp spur of necessity which, she knew by experience, always acted upon her like inspiration, she arranged her hair and her looks in the glass, and resolutely descended to the dining-room.

Meanwhile the colonel, faithful to his purpose of going back to Julia with all possible speed, had already taken his wine and crust of bread, and had just mounted into his saddle as Miss Thorwold walked across the hall.

• And which must we follow first? For the adventures of both must be recounted. Let the preference be given to age. Colonel Dermont had for some years past preferred a gentle amble to any other pace; and his favourite horse, perhaps in compliment to his master, had very cordially adopted the same preference; but both horse and man were upon the present occasion constrained

by what seemed to both a very urgent necessity, to change their ordinary movement for a pretty active trot, which brought them in a short time to Mrs. Verepoint's door.

The three ladies had just concluded their noonday meal, and Charlotte perceiving from her friend Julia's countenance that the Colonel's tête-à-tête visit had not been a pleasant one, invited her to take a stroll among the dark old oaks at the back of the house, instead of letting her go up stairs to exhibit her swollen eyes in the bright light drawing-room.

The old lady meanwhile was enjoying her autumn fire in that abode of all comfort, and there it was that the Colonel was desired to enter, while the steps of Miss Drummond, for whom he had inquired, were traced by a light-heeled footman who speedily ushered her, greatly astonished at the summons, into his presence. Colonel Dermont, however, was too much in earnest to bestow any time upon ceremony, and quite unmindful, or indifferent, to the effect which his asking twice

within three hours for a tête-à-tête with his *ci-devant* ward must produce, he said within less than a minute after the two young ladies entered the room,

“ Julia, my dear, will you let me speak to you for five minutes alone ?”

The kind accent in which this was uttered, as well as the words themselves, seemed to drop balm upon the aching heart of Julia, and though perfectly unable to guess what could possibly have happened to clear her, she felt at once that she *was* cleared, and with an eye and an aspect radiant with recovered gladness, she accepted the arm that was gallantly offered to her, and accompanied the penitent, but well-pleased old gentleman down stairs.

Having reached the fine old room which had twice before been the scene of such important interviews to her, Julia almost trembled as she closed the door; but ere she had time to ask herself again, “ What *can* it be ?” her friendly guardian seized her by both her hands, and having first impressed a paternal kiss on her fair forehead, he said, “ I know

you would not like to see an old man kneel to you, my dear child, but upon my honour, Julia, I can hardly help it. You are an angel, my dear, you are, indeed, and it is not very long since, in this very room, I behaved to you like a brute. Can you forgive me, Julia Drummond?"

"Indeed, and indeed, dearest Colonel, I was never for a single moment angry with you," she replied. "What could you think, but just what you did think? But how is it, who is it, that has set you right? What vexed me most of all was, that it did not seem possible you ever *should* know the truth. Who is it that has told?"

"Who, Julia? Who should it be but our own generous Alfred? You sent me home miserable enough this morning, I can tell you, and the very moment I caught sight of Alfred, I told him of my sad disappointment, Julia, in all ways. But that dear boy was born to be the joy of my life, as he has proved to me over and over again. And now, the very moment he found out the cause of my trouble, he cured it—cured it

by a single word, Julia. He said the money was lent to him, and I need not tell you that all my miserable thoughts and suspicions were cured at once. You must have known *that*, my poor dear child, well enough, and I honour you, Julia, for having kept your promise so faithfully."

That Julia's heart was lightened of a grievously heavy load is most certain, and she thanked Heaven for the blessing, which was assuredly not the less precious because it came from the generous self-devotion of Alfred. Nevertheless, she did not, and could not, feel perfectly satisfied by the communication of the colonel. Had he indeed listened to Alfred's avowal that the money was lent to him, without making any inquiry as to his reason for borrowing it? If so, it was a greater degree of forbearance than Alfred himself had expected, or he would not so vehemently have objected to the fact of the borrowing being made known to him. And if he had asked, what had the answer been? Had Miss Thorwold any thing to do with it? Or had she not? To make any

such inquiry, however, was perfectly out of the question, and Julia had received a hearty farewell benediction from her recovered friend, when the door of Mrs. Verepoint's library was suddenly thrown open, and Susan Jenkins, vehemently struggling against the efforts of the servant who would have prevented her entrance, rushed into the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE countenance of the girl was violently flushed, and she trembled so greatly from having over-exerted herself by the speed she had used in walking from the Mount, which distance she had traversed in an incredibly short space of time, that she caught hold of a chair to support herself, as she came into the room, and then, almost unconsciously as it seemed, sunk into it, and burst into tears. Both the colonel and Julia exclaimed at the same moment, "What is the matter, Susan?—Who is hurt?—Who is ill?—What is the matter?"

The girl, though evidently much exhausted, and rapidly becoming as pale as

she had before been the contrary, had sufficient strength and presence of mind left to reply, "Nobody is hurt—nobody is ill."

"Then she has been ill-treated, or hurt, in some manner herself, Julia," said Colonel Dermont; and taking her hand in his, to feel her pulse, exclaimed, "I believe the poor girl is going to faint: she ought to have a glass of wine, or some drops, or something."

Julia, greatly alarmed for her favourite, ran up stairs with all speed to Mrs. Verepoint, and gave such an account of the poor girl's condition, and of the difficulty of finding out what was the matter with her, that Mrs. Verepoint, both alarmed and curious, hurried into the library with Julia, while Charlotte was despatched to find a glass of wine, without suffering any servant to come into the room with her. A bottle of strong salts in the hands of the old lady had already proved very efficacious, and the glass of wine brought by her daughter still more so, and so rapidly did her complexion appear to be recovering its

usual tint, that the colonel seemed to think the best thing he could do would be to take his leave, and trust the nervous young waiting-maid to the care of the kind ladies who surrounded her. But no sooner had he expressed this intention, than Susan Jenkins gave symptoms of being worse than ever, for she clasped her hands one minute, and used them with such a vehement effort to detain him the next, that they all began to fear that the misfortune which had befallen her, be it what it might, had disturbed her reason. Perhaps she perceived this suspicion in the looks which were exchanged between them, for, making a strong effort to recover her usual manner, she got up and said,

“ Pray, sir, let me beg of you as the very greatest favour, that you will not go. I have got something, that concerns you nearly, to tell. I did not know that I should have the good fortune of finding you here, and it was to Miss Julia that I meant to tell it all; but it is far better, and more

proper in every way, that it should be you, sir."

"If it is something which concerns the colonel, young woman," said Mrs. Verepoint, gently, "I and my daughter had better go away; and I dare say Colonel Dermont and Miss Drummond will give you leave to sit down again, for you do not look yet as if you were quite able to stand."

"No, madam, no," replied Susan, "I have nothing to say but what ought to be known: all the danger is that it should not be known enough;—and yet I would rather, too, that both these young ladies were away: my horrid story is noways fit for their ears."

The two girls needed no second hint, but instantly left the room. Susan had reseated herself, and, considering the nature and the importance of what she had to communicate, her efforts to compose herself, in order that her strange tale might be intelligible, did great credit to her good sense. Yet, with all this, it seemed doubtful for a minute or two whether she would be able

to execute her purpose. Colonel Dermont evidently suspected that the promised disclosure would prove to be the history of some rustic adventure of gallantry, the disgrace of which the agitated young woman was anxious to remove from herself; but Mrs. Verepoint, to whom he had communicated his suspicion, did not agree with him. There was an air of great innocence and modesty in the countenance of Susan Jenkins, and though prepared, by her desiring the absence of the young ladies, to hear some history unfit for their ears, she felt a strong persuasion that the poor girl was not the heroine of it.

“Now then, young woman,” said Mrs. Verepoint, kindly, “tell us at once what it is which has affected you so strongly.”

Susan paused still another moment to decide, as it seemed, where she should begin, and then she said, “My last service in London was in the house of Mrs. Stedworth, in Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly. I never quite liked it, because there was something that I could not make out in the manner in which

so many fine ladies, and gentlemen, too, sometimes, came visiting to my mistress. Not but what she could look, and talk, as much like a lady herself as any body, when she chose it; but this was not always, and it seemed strange, and *was* strange to see the great difference there was between some of the people that came to visit her, and others; and she quite as intimate with the one as the other. Besides letting lodgings, she made a trade of selling and buying ladies' clothes, but the people that sold, and the people that bought, all seemed intimate with her alike. About two months ago, or rather more, I was ordered to set the drawing-room floor in order for a lady lodger, and two days after, there came the most beautiful young lady that ever I saw in my life, and I had to wait upon her, and dress her, and so of course I soon came to know her face quite well, and could not be likely to be mistaken in it. Directly after she came, there was a gentleman who visited her every day regularly, dining with her most days, but never failing to come every evening. His name was Lord

William. I never heard any other name. My mistress and the young lady, whose name I never heard at all from first to last (for my mistress always called her 'drawing-room,' or the drawing-room lady when she spoke of her); but my mistress and this young lady never scrupled to talk before me when I was brushing her hair, or helping her dress, about her being going to be married to Lord William, and at last the day came. My mistress made no secret to me about it. She said that she was going to church with them, and a hackney-coach came to the door in the morning, which took Lord William, the young lady, and my mistress away. In about an hour, as well as I can remember, they came back, and in the meantime I had, according to my orders, prepared breakfast for them in the drawing-room, and after they had breakfasted, I was sent out to call another coach for the bride and bridegroom, which I heard ordered to some railroad station, I forget which. At the end of a fortnight they came back again, and then Lord William lodged in the house too, as the hus-

band of the lady. And for a few days they seemed just as new married people might be, the gentleman very polite and fond of the lady, and she always smiling, and looking as beautiful, and as nicely dressed as if she was going to receive all the company in the world. During this time my mistress always called the new married lady, Lady William. But it was but a very little while before I began to see a change in more ways than one. Lady William, as they called her, seemed to grow cross, and out of spirits, while my mistress grew gayer, and smarter-looking every day. She was not over young, but she could manage when she liked it, to look very handsome too, and she used to dress as nice as the lady herself, and always in time to go to the door herself when Lord William came home to dinner. And then he changed his way of knocking, and came to the door with a single tap, but still my mistress seemed to know that it was him, for she always went to the door herself, and from the time he took to knocking in this way, he always turned into

the front parlour before he went up stairs, and would sit there with my mistress for near upon an hour together. At last the lord and the lady seemed to have a quarrel, for I heard very high words between them one evening, and my lord came down stairs and went into the parlour, and sat there longer, I should think, than an hour, and then he went out. My mistress then came into the kitchen to me, and told me to take up tea to my lady, and ask her if she wanted any thing. Which I did, and she told me she was going to bed, which she did almost directly. And then my mistress came to me and told me that I must go to bed too, for that his lordship was not coming home, and that she wanted the house quiet, because she was not well herself, and meant to go to bed early. My bed was in a very little room on the parlour floor, just at the top of the kitchen stairs. I went into my room, but I did not go to bed, because I had a bit of sewing to do for myself, but I sat as quiet as possible, because I would not disturb anybody. About

half-past one in the morning, as I knew by the clock that stood close outside my door, a very gentle tap come to the door of the house, as if it were made with fingers, instead of the knocker, and at first I was frightened because of the late hour, and thought that if it was any body at all, it must be a thief trying some of their London tricks to get in, so instead of going to the house door, I softly pushed a little bolt upon my own, and stood close to it, all in a tremble to listen. And sure enough, I presently heard creeping steps in the passage, and I looked through the key-hole, and plainly saw Lord William and my mistress. She had a candle in her hand, and I saw her make signs to him not to make a noise with his feet, pointing towards my door to show that he might be heard. And then she began to creep up the stairs very gently, and he followed in the same manner behind her. They remained together," added Susan, in a manner that showed her reluctance to enter upon such details, but with a degree of quiet firmness also, that showed

her determined not to shrink from any thing that was necessary to make her narrative understood.

“On the following morning,” she continued, “Lord William went out before breakfast, but employed himself in the parlour for some time before he did so, in writing, as I presume, a letter to the lady, for he gave me a letter for her, as he went out. My mistress was with her when I delivered it, and something that I said in answer to a question which the lady asked, gave Mrs. Stedworth reason to suppose that I was acquainted with what had happened the night before; and she followed me out of the room, calling me every sort of bad name, and she called up the charwoman to bear witness that I was turned out of her house at a minute’s warning, as a thief, and a liar, and worse. Of course I did not try to defend myself, but got away as soon as possible.”

Here Susan paused, and, fixing her eyes upon the ground, remained for a moment silent. She then stood up, and seemed in-

tending to say something more, but her colour varied, and again she seemed too much agitated to speak.

The colonel very evidently thought that the long story they had been listening to, belonged to the class of narratives usually called "cock and bull." He shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well, my girl, I suppose I may go now?"

Even Mrs. Verepoint, notwithstanding the decided predilection she had felt in her favour, thought that they had been detained for very little purpose, and rather coldly saying, "I dare say, young woman, you are very glad to have exchanged so disreputable a place, for one so very different, but there is no use in talking about it now." She rose up for the purpose of attending the colonel out of the room.

The critical moment was come. Greatly as Susan Jenkins dreaded the effect which her next words must produce on the colonel, she knew that she must speak them now, or never. But she could not look him in the face as she did it; forgetting for the moment

that her words were to save him from disgrace, she felt as if she were about to overwhelm the honoured patron of her race with shame, and while she suddenly stretched out her hand to stop their exit, she fixed her eyes upon the face of Mrs. Verepoint as she exclaimed, in a deep, hollow, but perfectly audible whisper, "That lady, and Mr. Alfred's intended wife, are the same person."

CHAPTER X.

THE effect produced by these words was far from being the same on Colonel Dermont and Mrs. Verepoint. The lady, though greatly shocked, and greatly surprised also, believed every word which the girl had spoken. The colonel, on the contrary, believed nothing, but that poor Susan had got into a house of the very worst description, and had either audaciously invented this improbable story of the beautiful Amelia, or else, that she had mistaken his charming daughter-in-law that was to be, for one of the unhappy beauties likely enough to be seen in such an establishment. That thus believing, he should be violently angry with poor Susan, was but

natural, and certainly he did not spare invectives against her "abominable falsehoods," as he scrupled not to call every word she had said.

"Leave the room, and leave the house instantly," he said. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Verepoint, but I must take the liberty of insisting upon it that she should leave the house instantly. Not for much would I have the mind of my young ward exposed to the corruption which this creature must carry with her wherever she goes. Begone!" he reiterated, with more vehemence, perhaps, than he was ever heard to speak with before. "I will not quit the premises till I know she is out of the way of poor dear Julia—whose heart, I do believe, she would break outright, if she were to repeat this horrid invention to her."

Susan looked terrified, and profoundly miserable ; but still she kept standing before him.

"Oh ! sir, don't send me away," she cried, "don't send me away till you are quite, quite

sure! Don't let the marriage be, till you are quite, quite sure!"

"Do you hear her?—do you hear her persevering insolence, my good lady? I certainly do not choose to lay hands on her myself, but I really must beg, Mrs. Verepoint, that you will permit some of your people to place her outside your gates, if she refuses to place herself there." And, assuming that the leave he asked was granted, the colonel rose, and walked towards the bell.

"No, sir, no!" said poor Susan, hastily preparing to leave the room. "I have tried to do my duty by the young gentleman, and by you too. But, of course, gentlefolks must act as they think right themselves. Perhaps they know better what is right than we do." And then, stopping but for half a moment to make an humble courtesy to Mrs. Verepoint, the ill-used Susan wrapped her shawl about her, and disappeared.

For a short space the old gentleman and lady sat looking at each other in silence; and then the colonel said: "Do you think,

madam, that since the beginning of the world, there ever was so audacious an instance of falsehood heard?"

"My dear colonel," replied the lady of the manor, "I should indeed be sorry, upon the evidence of any one, and much more on that of a young woman of whom we know so little, to receive as true, a statement which, besides being highly improbable, makes so horrible an attack upon one concerning whom you must feel so deeply interested. Nevertheless, you must forgive me if I say that, were I in your situation, I would not take the improbability of the story as a perfect refutation of it. I am willing enough to hope that it is, as you suppose, an infamous invention; but this should by no means prevent my inquiring a good deal more about it."

"You may depend upon it, my dear lady, I will inquire enough; and that I may set about doing so without loss of time, I will now take my leave of you. Give my love to dear little Julia, and tell her I shall set the matter of the mortgage right directly.

Dear, good little soul ! I certainly do love that girl almost as well as if she were my own daughter. She has behaved so beautifully about a little money affair."

Mrs. Verepoint received this hint, though it was perfectly unintelligible to her, with the air of a person who was glad to hear, and ready to believe, all that could be said of the person under discussion.

"Yes, yes, I know Julia is a favourite with you," said Colonel Dermont, adding, in an accent that seemed to mean, "and that is more than my beautiful daughter-in-law is." "By the way, Mrs. Verepoint, will you be so good as to tell me whether you suppose the precious young lady who has just left us meant to insinuate that Miss Thorwold was married, or was not married, to the Lord William she talked about?"

"I think she meant to say that she was married," replied the old lady.

"Now is it not strange," said the colonel, laughing and shaking his head at her, "that a woman of your excellent judgment should think of such a farrago of improbabilities

worth inquiring into? Just think it over, will you? Here's a high-born young lady, niece to a peer of the realm, and united in holy wedlock to a young nobleman, who, after running away to London, to be married to him, runs back again into the country as fast as she can trot, in order to be married to my son Alfred! I should think it would turn out one of the most remarkable cases of bigamy upon record. But the judge will hardly hang her—do you think he will? She is too handsome for that. However, I will go and see about it directly." And gaily kissing his hand, he left the room.

On reaching the Mount, he found the family in considerable confusion. Mrs. Dermont herself, notwithstanding the elegant regularity of her habits, had left her luxurious bergère, in which she took her usual morning allowance of knitting, for the purpose of superintending in person, at a very interesting board of inquiry which had been instituted in the parlour of the housekeeper.

"My mistress desired, colonel, that when you came in, you would be pleased to come

to her in the housekeeper's room," said a servant who was hovering on the steps, and seemed to be waiting for him.

The colonel obeyed without making any reply, and there he found his lady seated in great state, with a large heap of plate spread out on a table before her, while the housekeeper and butler, standing side by side, with solemn looks, and each with a long catalogue in their hands, appeared to be taking account of the valuable articles which lay before them.

"What is all this for, my dear?" said the colonel. "And why do you want to see me?"

"Oh! colonel, we have been in such a way since you left us! I am thankful you are come again, for I feel as if I did not know what was going to happen next!" said Mrs. Dermont, looking very serious and frightened.

"What is the matter? Where is Alfred? Where is Amelia?" demanded the colonel, hastily.

"Oh! poor dear loves! It was no use

plaguimg them to come here, so I left them to comfort one another in the library. Poor dear Amelia ! She has had the worst fright of all !”

“What is the matter ?” said the good colonel, rather impatiently. “I do wish you would tell me.”

“And so I will, colonel. It is what I am going to do,” replied Mrs. Dermont. “We have found out since you went away, after luncheon, that we have been harbouring a most horrid and depraved creature in the house, a thorough-paced thief, who has been in gaol again and again, and one of the most abandoned creatures, in every way, that ever found entrance into a decent family. One of the first things to be thought of was the plate, of course, and I was really so anxious about it, that I could not be easy till I came here myself, to see Robinson and Smith go over it with the catalogue.”

“And who was the girl ?” returned the colonel, looking very intelligent. “If I am not greatly mistaken, I could name her.”

“You don’t say so, my dear colonel !” ex-

claimed Mrs. Dermont, with energy. "Then I am sure you have heard something more than we know about her, for I am sure, for any thing I ever saw or heard of the girl, she is one of the very last in the world I should have suspected. It is no other than Susan Jenkins, colonel, Julia Drummond's new maid!"

"To be sure it is, my dear," replied the colonel, "and upon my honour and life, I shall think we are very lucky if we escape with only the loss of as much plate as she could carry, for I have seen her show off this morning in a style that would prevent my feeling at all surprised, if I saw her busily employed in setting fire to the house. But I want to hear your story first, and then you shall have mine. How was she found out there?"

"Why in the most shocking and abrupt way possible for our poor dear Miss Thorwold. She was sitting in her own room before luncheon, looking over some of her wedding clothes, I believe, pretty creature, when she heard the door open, and looking

round, she saw what frightened her almost out of her senses. It seems, you see, that when she went to London, like an angel as she is, to attend upon her dying friend, she mentioned her being there to nobody—indeed, she says, that the town was so empty, that it would have been difficult to find any body; and, therefore, when she came back from Nice, after the poor young lady's death, she was obliged, just at the time she wrote to us, you know, to go into a lodging for a few days. She knew the woman who kept the lodgings perfectly well, and she says that she is one of the best creatures in existence; but the poor good woman had been unlucky enough to take this vile girl, Susan Jenkins, into the house, and it was but a day or two before Miss Thorwold left it, that she was found out to be what she is. Amelia did not like," continued Mrs. Dermont, lowering her voice, "to tell me all the particulars, because Alfred was in the room; but she was found out to be worse than any thing poor Amelia had ever heard of; stories of all kinds came out against her, and a policeman

was brought in to take her out of the house, for she stood in the drawing-room abusing the good woman of the house, who had come in to account to Miss Thorwold for the noise, and there she stood, laughing because they both looked so frightened. Amelia says she thinks she must have been intoxicated, she used such terrible language. Well, colonel, you may fancy the shock it must have been to her, sweet creature! when she turned round her head and saw this horrid girl! She says that she believes she screamed, for the girl, shutting the door behind her, stepped forward and held her fist in her face, telling her that if she dared to mention the ever having seen her before, she would make up some story about herself—about Miss Thorwold, I mean, that should stick to her to the last day she had to live. To which Miss Thorwold replied, with uncommon courage, considering that she was alone with her, that what she could say of her must be a matter of perfect indifference, but that she should take immediate measures to have her sent out of the house; upon

which the girl turned round and hurried out of the room, without saying another word, and the dear girl came down to us, looking frightened out of her senses, and told us what I have now told you. Alfred rang the bell and inquired if Susan Jenkins were still in the house, to which Thomas replied, no; that they had seen her go out in a great hurry, putting on her bonnet and shawl as she went, and without saying a single word to any body. That is my story, colonel, and now you must tell yours."

"The plate seems all right, colonel," said the steady butler, who, notwithstanding he had been listening pretty attentively to all his mistress had been saying, had pursued his official occupation without intermission.

"So much the better, Robinson," replied the colonel, "she seems to have started off in too great a hurry to have been able to take much; and now, my dear, if you will come into the drawing-room with me, you shall hear what I have got to tell of this clever young gaol bird. It is no subject for laughter though. I am truly sorry for her poor

father and mother—it is enough to break their hearts.”

In the drawing-room they found the lovers, and, to judge by the countenance of Alfred, their happiness had not been in any degree affected by the disagreeable adventure of the morning. Amelia, as usual, was seated on the sofa, and, as usual, Alfred occupied the foot-stool at her feet. The beautiful features of Amelia, too, looked radiant with tenderness and love. The moment the colonel entered, however, was a moment of trial for her. The mother and the son had listened to her statements with a fulness and perfection of belief, which had exceeded her hopes, and entirely banished her fears ; but would the more worldly colonel do the same? The question was a tremendous one for her, and with a sort of hurry and agitation, which it was beyond her power to master, she rose up the moment she saw him, and stood as if waiting to receive her doom. For, from the moment that Susan had turned away from her and her bribe, she had felt as certain that she was relating all she knew concerning her Half-

Moon-street adventures, as she could have been had she enjoyed the advantage of being concealed behind one of the damask curtains in Mrs. Verepoint's library, during the scene that has been described in the last chapter.

Had time been left her to recollect the strangeness of her thus suddenly rising, and of her standing in such an unusual way, awaiting the approach of her polite future father-in-law, she would have been conscious of having so far yielded to her terrors as to have been guilty of a great blunder, but ere any such disagreeable thought could arise, the arms of the old gentleman were thrown round her, and she felt herself most affectionately pressed to his bosom.

Now, then, all that was wanting to the perfect restoration of her tranquillity was to be assured that the very thing which, a few hours before, she had most dreaded, had actually taken place. She only wanted to know that Susan had poured her tale into the ears of Colonel Dermont, in order to feel, like to Napoleon in days of yore, that a favouring star presided over her destiny,

which for ever kept her safe from danger, let it threaten her as it would.

Nor was this crowning satisfaction long wanting; no sooner had the colonel fulfilled his intention of impressing a paternal kiss upon her forehead, than he gallantly led her back to the sofa, and, seating himself beside her, began to relate with a good deal of spirit and humour the outrageously improbable tale of the reprobate Susan.

“ I have no doubt, my dear,” said he, in conclusion, and addressing himself to his exceedingly amused future daughter-in-law; “ I have no doubt at all, that if a sufficient portion of time were allowed her to arrange the facts of her narratives with a little more attention to probability, Miss Susan Jenkins might become one of the first romancers of the age. But being somewhat in a hurry this morning, she rather crowded events upon us. I suspect that before she came to the end of her story, she forgot that she had declared you were married at the beginning of it; and, to be sure, it was altogether the greatest hodge-podge of absurdities that ever

was listened to out of a mad-house. Nevertheless, I don't see what we can do to the creature, and that rather vexes me. She ought to be flogged, and sent to prison, there is no doubt about that. But we cannot punish her in this, or in any other way, you know, without having legal authority for it, and we are too pleasantly engaged just at present to have time for making depositions, and consulting lawyers. Don't you think so, my dear?"

"Upon my word, dear colonel, if you ask my opinion about it, I shall answer you more in the spirit of the gospel than the law; for I think the spectacle of a young creature so utterly depraved, is so pitiable, that it is quite unnecessary that the hand of human justice should visit her, in order that she should suffer, even in this life, sufficient punishment for all her offences."

This beautiful sentiment, falling as it did from lips that seemed to move in harmony with its gentleness, produced very great effect upon the trio that listened to it.

"Angel!" exclaimed Alfred, lifting his

eyes to heaven, as if to salute the region from which she had recently descended.

“Dear child!” cried Mrs. Dermont, looking ready to weep from tender admiration, “that is what I call true Christian charity!”

“And so it is, Mrs. Dermont,” said the colonel, taking Amelia’s hand, and kissing it, “and I feel as if I ought to be ashamed of myself for wishing to take vengeance upon a poor unhappy wretch who is so very certain of being miserable, without any help of mine! God bless you, my dear! You are an example to us all.”

It was, however, an example too sublime for the hot-headed Alfred to follow, and he told his father privately, that he should not be at ease as long as this abandoned girl continued in the neighbourhood.

“Not that I would actually bring her to condign punishment if I had the power of doing so,” said he, “for I have a great regard for her father, but I cannot endure the idea of her repeating such lies as you have heard her tell to-day, among the servants and low people of the neighbourhood. And I shall

walk over to pay poor Jenkins a visit, and furnish him with the means of sending her back to London again to her aunt. Such a creature is enough to corrupt all the innocent girls in the parish."

"Well, Alfred, I dare say you are right," replied his father, with his accustomed deference to all the young gentleman's opinions, "I would wish you to do exactly as you like about it. Only take care, my dear, to be at home in good time for dinner."

The young man promised to comply with this very reasonable request, and telling his beloved that he was going to tear himself from her, for half an hour, in order to call upon one of the villagers whom he wished to see on business, he set off.

Having reached the cottage, he knocked at the door, which was opened to him by a girl of twelve years old, who was employed in ironing.

"Where is your father, Nancy?" said the young man.

"I don't rightly know, sir," replied the young laundress; "but if your honour will be

pleased to walk into the best kitchen, and wait a bit, I'll go and look for him."

She opened a door as she spoke, and the young man entered the neat apartment, which had often, in their younger days, been converted into a play-room for the pleasure of himself and Julia. The young girl drew the door after her, but did not shut it, so that although he was perfectly concealed from the sight of any one who was in the outer room, he heard every word that was spoken there as plainly as if he had been in it himself. This fact was speedily made manifest to him by the entrance of Julia Drummond and the unfortunate Susan.

As the words, "*My dearest Susan,*" uttered in the most affectionate accents, were the first sounds he heard, he was on the point of rushing out from his covert, in order to rescue his friend Julia from the contamination of holding intercourse with a wretch with whose crimes it was evident she was not yet acquainted.

But they spoke again, and his desire to overhear their conversation became greater

than his inclination to stop it. "Sit down, my dear Miss Julia!" said Susan, anxiously. "Indeed you look as pale as death, and altogether unfit to stand, without thinking about walking."

"But I must walk, Susan, able or not able, I must walk. Dear, kind Mrs. Verepoint thinks I am lying upon the bed all this time, but what is the good of lying upon the bed, when I cannot rest? Susan! Susan! if you love me you must do something to put off this horrible marriage; the very idea of it breaks my heart!"

"But my dear young lady, what can I do more than I have done?" replied Susan. "Have I not done my very best—have I not said every shocking thing that I could think of to the colonel himself? And did he mind what I said about her a bit more than if it had been so much praise? And I would say it again and again to please you, Miss Julia, if I did not know for certain sure that there was no good to be got by it, and it is such a horrid story to tell, Miss Julia, that I would a deal rather not say it over again to any

body. Every body as hears me telling it must, I know, think me the most bold and impudent girl that ever lived, and when it is so very plain that no good is to be got by telling it, I can't but say, Miss Julia, that I should be very, *very* thankful never to have it to say again."

"Oh, Susan!" replied Julia, in a voice which trembled with earnestness, "if you did but know the misery you make me feel by saying so, I am quite sure you never would say it again."

"I am sure too, Miss Julia," replied Susan, "that I love you too well to deny you any thing, but in the way of stopping Mr. Alfred's marriage, a deal more might be hoped for by your repeating it all yourself, my dear young lady, they would listen to you so much more patiently than they would to me; they couldn't stop you short by saying to you 'be-gone!' as they did to me. Why will you not tell it all over again yourself, Miss Julia."

"Why don't I do it?" cried Julia, in an accent of angry remonstrance, "what nonsense it is to talk so! what good could my

telling it do? Could I say that I was in the same house with them in London, and that I saw it all? Would they not know that I was telling them things of which I knew nothing?"

"But you could say that you had it from me, and then it would be the same as if I said it myself, only it would be ten times better," said Susan, beseechingly. "Besides, Miss Julia, you seem quite entirely to forget that they have all said I should never enter their doors again; I cannot go in by force, you know, and it is no good for me to promise what I am sure I should never be able to do. It must be yourself, Miss Julia, indeed, indeed it must, if any body attempts to try it again; I never can, no, I never can forget the colonel's look and voice, when he cried out 'begone!'"

"And for fear of hearing that, Susan, you will let me see this hateful marriage take place before my eyes, though you know it is a sight that will break my heart; but Susan," continued Julia, in accents of the most earnest entreaty, "but Susan, there is no need that

you ever should hear the colonel say ‘begone’ any more ; I will never ask you to attempt saying a word to him again ; let us forget that we ever talked about it. All I will ask you to do now is to see Mr. Alfred himself, say to him solemnly, Susan, that you conjure him, as he values his own honour, and the honour of his family, to listen to you ; he will not refuse you, Susan ; he is too kind, too good for that, and when you see him ready to listen, tell him exactly word for word the same history that you told the colonel, in the presence of Mrs. Verepoint. It is impossible, oh ! it is impossible, that when he hears that, he should persevere in his intention of marrying Miss Thorwold.”

“ Well ! ” replied Susan, with a sigh, “ I will try to do as you will have me, my dear young lady, though I think if you was to say it all yourself, it would go a deal further towards obtaining what you want.”

“ Never mind about that, Susan, you have given me your promise, and I am contented ; it is the only chance there is left, for I have told you already that *my* speaking to Mr.

Alfred on the subject is altogether impossible. And now I must go, and you shall walk as far as the end of the lane with me. It is very cruel for you to be sent away, merely because you have done what I should never have forgiven you for not doing."

As Julia concluded this speech she walked from the outer chamber of the cottage into the wood, and Susan followed her.

Here then, was a new and perfectly intelligible interpretation of this strange history—intelligible, but startling too. That Julia loved him many circumstances had led Alfred to believe, but that she should take such means to break off his marriage with Amelia shocked as much as it surprised him. There was a depravity both of feeling and principle in the act which was wonderfully at variance with what he had ever believed to be the character of Julia, but had he not heard it acknowledged? Could he doubt the testimony of his own senses? and then, as if this evidence were not sufficient, a thousand, thousand innocent proofs of her affection rose to his mind *to prove her guilty!*

That he was shocked, deeply shocked, is most certain, but something of the softness of pity mixed itself with his indignation, and a tear, one solitary tear, rose to his eye as he murmured to himself the words, "not wisely but too well."

His whole scheme of action was, however, changed by this discovery. It was quite evident that whatever Susan's conduct might have been while in London, she was no further guilty in the present instance, than having yielded to the passionate wishes of her unhappy mistress, in attempting to prevent his marriage with his angelic Amelia. He, therefore, determined to retreat from the cottage without executing the purpose for which he came, and far from wishing to send back the repentant Susan to fresh scenes of wickedness and temptation, he was glad at his heart that the unfortunate girl was under the shelter of her honest father's roof, where, it might be hoped, she would repent of, and forsake, her evil ways.

"The worthy Jenkins will only suppose I was tired of waiting," thought he, as he

sprang lightly over a fence which took him in a contrary direction from the lane by which Julia and Susan had departed, for he had no inclination to afford an opportunity to the latter, for the performance of the promise which he had heard extorted from her.

Shocking as he could not but feel the discovery of the meaning to have been, there was, nevertheless, something strangely soothing to his feelings in knowing that no slander rested upon the reputation of his Amelia, save what arose from the unmeasured love of poor Julia. But this soothing sort of sorrow could be shared by no one—no, not even with the divine Amelia herself, though such a proof that she had been right in her interpretation of Julia's motives respecting the loan, could not fail of being gratifying to her. But as he felt it was the only gratification he could ever wish to deny her, Alfred reconciled himself to it without much difficulty.

CHAPTER XI.

It is scarcely necessary to relate the obvious fact that Mrs. Verepoint, after the departure of Colonel Dermont, had repeated to her daughter and Miss Drummond all the most essential parts of Susan's terrible narrative; nor is it necessary to attempt describing Julia's feelings as she listened to it. The incredulity of the colonel did not at first in any great degree lessen her hope that Alfred would be saved from the dreadful fate which his blind passion had so nearly brought upon him, and it was only in her subsequent interview with Susan at her father's house, (whither she had immediately followed, when the poor girl was so ignominiously chased

from that of Mrs. Verepoint) that she began seriously to fear that her statement would not be productive of any effect whatever, excepting that of destroying her own character.

This fear was most painfully confirmed by a note from Colonel Dermont to Mrs. Verepoint, in which he informed her, with a little air of pardonable triumph at his own superior sagacity, that the whole mystery of Miss Susan Jenkins' statement had been most satisfactory explained to him on his return home; and then he briefly communicated the leading particulars of Miss Thorwold's veracious narrative concerning her.

It was quite in vain that the miserable Julia, after the arrival of this note, endeavoured to revive Mrs. Verepoint's first predilection in favour of Susan. That excellent lady knew nothing personally of the girl, either good, or bad, except her decent appearance, and the simple but forcible style in which, as it had seemed to her at the time she had recounted her narrative respecting Miss Thorwold.

But this simple and forcible style of stating

slandrous falsehoods could not fail of being now remembered to her prejudice. The extreme improbability of the tale, stripped as it was of all the circumstances which might have explained it, made it easier to believe the contradiction, than the assertion of the facts, and good Mrs. Verepoint did believe the contradiction accordingly, and considered it as her duty to combat Julia's unjustifiable faith in her servant's wild and improbable statements, in preference to the perfectly natural refutation of them furnished by a young lady of high birth and consideration.

It was in consequence of Mrs. Verepoint's having taken this view of the case, in which her daughter, after listening to her reasonings on the subject, completely joined, that Julia felt obliged to make her interview with Susan a secret one. But though she succeeded in obtaining a pretty long conversation with the poor girl, she returned from it considerably more miserable than she went.

Had Susan been in the least degree aware of the nature of her young lady's feelings towards Alfred, she might not have given up

her attempt to save him from the wiles of Miss Thorwold so easily, but as it was she felt no motive strong enough to induce, or even to justify her in disobeying the commands of the family by interfering with their concerns. She had no power of obtaining proof of what she had asserted, and as her own character was not sufficiently known to obtain belief for her statements, the making them could do no good to any one.

The promise which Julia had exacted from her, was given greatly against her own judgment and inclination; for the representations which had reached her from the servants at the Mount, of the young squire's adoration of his affianced bride, convinced her that to repeat her story to him would only be to repeat the laying herself open to suspicion and rough language. Nevertheless it was her purpose to keep it, if accident favoured her with an opportunity of seeing him.

That she should seek him at his own house, Julia confessed would be a vain attempt, as it was not to be supposed that she

would obtain admission there; but she left her with a most earnest entreaty that she would watch for him wherever she thought he was most likely to be found.

And this, the good girl, notwithstanding her repugnance to the task, very faithfully intended to do; but her purpose was defeated, as may easily be imagined, by Alfred's foreknowledge of her intention.

Miss Thorwold meanwhile, though now pretty well assured that it was beyond the power of fate, or fortune, to prevent the marriage, which was fixed to take place on the following Tuesday (four days from that of poor Susan's discomfiture), thought that it might be as well to address a few lines to her excellent friend Mrs. Stedworth, a compliment which, to say truth, she had rather thoughtlessly neglected since her return to the country, in order to inform her of the present favourable state of her affairs, and also to prepare her to answer any questions respecting Susan in a proper manner. It must be remembered that the young lady knew nothing of the intimacy between Lord

William Hammond and the excellent Stedworth, nor of Susan's statement concerning it. Her letter to her humble friend was as follows:—

“ I ought to apologise to you a thousand times, my dear good Stedworth, for not having written before, but if you knew the persevering torment of ‘*young love*,’ you would neither wonder at, nor blame me. All, however, is going famously well with me, and as courtship, thank Heaven, is generally cured by matrimony, I know that I shall be better able to find time to write to you after my marriage, than before it. I think the mother and father of my youthful Adonis are as much bewitched by my manifold perfections as the poor youth himself; for, from the very hour of my return, they have been driving post-haste to the wedding with quite as much zeal as myself. And now, I am happy to tell you, that the settlements are completed, and only await the arrival of my uncle for his signature. My lady aunt has done wonders for me in the important matter of wedding garments of all sorts, and the

happy day is fixed to be Tuesday. Let us hope, dear friend, that the business will be done more effectually this time than the last.

“ All this, you will say, is very smooth sail—into port, and I can fancy you opening wide those marvellous eyes of yours, as you read, and exclaiming, ‘ What luck ! ’ But what will you say when I tell you that this good luck, as you may well call it, has gone prosperously on without ever veering a point, in spite of two as boisterous gales as ever a well-rigged vessel, with a handsome figure-head, had the ill-luck to encounter. But what can ill-luck do against my star? Nothing—positively nothing, as you shall hear. The first storm that threatened blew right in my teeth in the shape of a horrid letter from a lawyer, threatening immediate arrest if the whole amount of my debts, which he had obligingly undertaken *en masse*, were not discharged immediately. I leave you to imagine my agreeable sensations. I very nearly fainted, but not quite, and by the time that my beautiful lips had recovered their roseate tint, I made up my mind what to do, and I

did it, my dear woman, with the most brilliant success. I composed a cock-and-a-bull story about my having put my name to a bill as security for a friend, and I got the whole sum paid with less difficulty than it used to cost me to pay my hairdresser—nor have I ever heard a single syllable upon the subject since. The second breeze was, if possible, more alarming still. Just imagine my turning round my head one fine morning, while enjoying in my own room a short respite from the ever-scorching fervour of my lover's love, and seeing full before me the face of your maid Susan, who used to have the honour of waiting upon my ladyship, when my ladyship was preparing for her downy pillow, in expectation of my lord! True, Mrs. Stedworth, upon my honour. Now would you not have thought that this might have been sufficient to bring on the concluding scene of my romance? Not a bit of it. The girl looked as much terrified as I could have done for the life of me—and left my presence without deigning to bestow a glance upon a handful of gold which I most

generously offered to her acceptance, or paying the slightest attention to some very good and rational advice which I also offered to her service. Of course there was but one thing to be done, and that I did with my usual brilliant success. I lost no time in informing my excellent mother-in-law that is to be, that she had in her house a young woman whom I had seen ignominiously dismissed from her service in London for theft, and various other atrocities, and so, of course, she has been dismissed with all proper indignation from the house; some rigmarole story which she told about me, being put down to malicious revenge for my having informed the family of her real character. Thus far, you see, all goes well, as I have told you; but yet I think it may be quite as well that you should hold yourself prepared in the very improbable case, that any questions respecting this Susan should be put to you from any one here. Should any such thing occur, you will be kind enough to remember that you turned her out of doors at a moment's warning, because you had discovered her to

be bad in every way. My next letter will, I flatter myself, bear the illustrious signature of Dermont, but for the present you must accept an assurance of my constant friendship, vouched by no better name than that of Amelia Thorwold."

* * * * *

The marriage of the handsome young heir of the Mount was not, as we have said, likely to approach so near its conclusion without causing a good deal of sensation in the neighbourhood. The beauty of the young lady, and the nobility of her uncle, were sufficiently well known, and sufficiently appreciated, to render the connexion he was about to make, a matter of very general satisfaction; though one or two of the individuals the most advanced in life might probably have been observed to remark among themselves, that they did not remember to have heard any mention made of the amount of her fortune. But although little, or no fault was found in the marriage itself, a good deal of discontent was manifested on account of the private manner of it. The

Mount had done itself such immortal honour by the admirable style in which it had given its public breakfast, that most people thought it quite a pity they should let such a very tempting opportunity pass for doing something else upon the same extended scale. Excuses, however, were found for them in most quarters. Some thought that perhaps the old people would be too much agitated for any thing of the kind, and others dared to say that they would do something which would be sure to satisfy every body when the young people returned from their bridal excursion.

Offence, downright absolute personal offence was taken but in one quarter, and that quarter was Beech Hill. This one quarter must, however, be understood to include the individual indignation of Miss Celestina Marsh, as well as the territorial resentment of its owners ; for since the departure of her brother for Germany, Beech Hill had become almost constantly the home of Miss Celestina. In fact, the lady of that elegant little mansion found it quite impossible to do

without her ; for, as her situation became more interesting every day, it became more and more important that she should have somebody with her who could make tea, nay, be trusted with the key of the tea-box, and moreover ring the bell whenever her " Liebe " did not happen to be in the way.

In this manner the charming Celestina became, as Hamlet hath it, more theirs than their own, and it was, therefore, in common, that the indignation of Locklow Wood and Beech Hill was both felt and expressed.

" As to the town, and people of that standing," as our dear Americans say, " I think it is most abominably shabby and stingy, beyond all belief, not to give them something of a gala-party ; but these sort of people must be contented to wait for the first christening," said Mrs. Stephens, making a sign to Celestina to arrange her footstool more commodiously. " But as to their not asking us, when the Verepoints, Ripleys, Mrs. Knight, and young Foster, are all going, it is something so like personal impertinence, that I shall not forgive it in a hurry, I promise

you. All these, you know, are exactly our own set, and that is what makes our not being asked, so very particular. I don't care a straw about all the more distant invitations, because as yet our acquaintance in the county has been confined to the neighbourhood of Stoke. But to be left out of our own particular set, is a degree of impertinence that even my temper cannot stand."

"It is just like them," replied Miss Marsh, with a very sour-looking frown. "But if I were you, dearest, I would snap my fingers at them all. There is not one of the whole party that is fit, in point of superiority of mind and all that, to wipe the dust off your shoes, nor Stephens's either. I am sure you must both of you despise them in your hearts, for it is impossible you can help it."

"Dear creature!" returned her friend, with a succession of affectionate little nods, "I do believe in my heart, my poor dear Celestina, that you are the only individual in the whole country who can thoroughly appreciate us. In short, you are the only one who has capacity to understand us.

Your brother might have done it. I quite felt that ; but his poor dear head was perfectly turned by Charlotte Verepoint's quiet little sentimental style of flirting with him. I know they both thought I was as blind as a mole, but they were quite mistaken, and your brother, poor fellow, is terribly out in his calculations if he fancies the heiress of the Grange has any serious thoughts about him. You may take my word for it, my dear, she would as soon marry her mother's butler."

"I'm sure I don't care who she marries, nasty, stiff little wretch," replied Celestina ; "my belief is that she will never marry at all, she looks so exactly like an old maid."

"So she does, Celestina ! That's monstrous true," returned Mrs. Stephens, laughing heartily. "That little precise look of hers is stamped with old maidism all over. What a dear droll creature you are ? Do you know I have the greatest mind in the world to get up a little opposition party on Tuesday, and get Ford and some of the other officers. You must forgive poor Ford about

that little Miss Drummond. I have never heard of his having spoken to her since."

"Dear me, Mrs. Stephens! I am sure I don't care who he speaks to so as he does not speak to me," replied Miss Marsh; "we were both of us quite mistaken about that stupid boy, for after all he really *is but* a boy and nothing else."

"It is very true, my dear, that he is rather young," returned her friend. "I got hold of a peerage at the library the other day, and I certainly was rather shocked to discover that he was but seventeen last April. However, if you really have quite given him up, I don't care how young he is, for in that case I shall quite give him up too as a pet man. I hate red hair."

"I dare say you will laugh at me," said Celestina, colouring a little, "but do you know, I think Mr. Macnab, the new apothecary, better looking than any one of the officers that we have got at Overby now."

"Macnab!" exclaimed Mrs. Stephens, almost in a scream, "why, my dear, he is sixty years of age if he is an hour. Besides,

I hate him for coming here, sneaking, in the hope of getting the business away from Richards. I delight in Richards, he is so gentle and tender in his manner with one !”

“Oh! I am not speaking of him as an apothecary, you know; indeed, I believe he does not call himself an apothecary at all, and they say he is only come here in the hope of recovering his spirits, after the death of his wife. I am sure you would like him, if you knew him, he is so exceedingly gentleman-like, and quite in your own way, by what I have heard the Murrays say, about science and America, you know, and every thing liberal and superior, quite like you and Mr. Stephens.”

“Is he indeed? Why did you never tell me so before?” demanded Mrs. Stephens, rather sharply.

“I did not tell you, dearest love,” replied Miss Marsh, “because I did not know any thing about it myself till I was asked to spend the day with the Murrays just before I came here this time; and then Captain Murray was talking about him all dinner-

time, almost saying that he had more in him than any man he had met, since he left Scotland; and Mr. Macnab spent the evening there, and he walked out with the two Murrays, to call upon me the next morning; and I felt quite sure that you would like him. He does say such clever quizzing things about the English clergy, you know, and ridicules exactly all the same things that you and Mr. Stephens do. I didn't care a straw about his age, he was so very lively and agreeable."

"I must confess that your account is very tempting by way of an acquaintance, Celestina, and I shall certainly tell William to call on him. But you must remember, my dear, that I shall never let him come near me by way of an apothecary,—you must be sure to remember that, Celestina, from the very first."

"Why do you suppose I should care whether you do or not, Mrs. Stephens," replied Celestina, briskly. "I only mentioned him as being a sort of person that I thought you would like to visit here. Why should

you suppose I should care about whether he gets business or not?"

"Oh! I don't know, I am sure, but one never can tell, my dear;—such very odd things do happen, you know. But I will tell you something, Celestina, that has just this moment come into my head. Would it not be good fun to have a breakfast party on the day of the wedding? I do not mean a public breakfast, of course—I could not bear the fatigue of it now, whatever I may do next summer,—but just a gay, laughing, friendly party of about ten perhaps, which just fills our table. They cannot help passing our gates, you know; every carriage, if they muster a hundred, must positively come this way, for there is no other, and if we all go out and give them a good stare, it will just be serving them right. What do you think of it?"

"I think it is a capital notion, so like you! But who should you have, dear love?"

"Why, I would have the Murrays, and tell them to bring their new friend, Mr. Macnab, in order to introduce him. Don't

you think it would be a nice opportunity of making the acquaintance ?”

“ Delightful !” exclaimed Miss Marsh, with sudden glee, “ I do really think you are the most charming woman in the world. I hope Mr. Stephens will approve it !”

“ No fear of that, dear,” replied the happy wife. “ My dearest William has no will but mine !”

* * * * *

CHAPTER XII.

THE days wore themselves away to hours, and the morning fixed for the marriage of Alfred and Amelia, arose bright in autumnal sunshine. The little park at the Mount, at a very early hour of the morning, presented a scene of the most pleasing gaiety. Tents were pitched under the shelter of such trees as still preserved their leaves, and a very large assemblage of the neighbouring cottagers were laying out (by permission) their bread and cheese breakfasts on the turf; abundant supplies of these comforts, accompanied by a very liberal allowance of ale, having been lodged under the canvass at an earlier hour still.

It had been arranged that the marriage was to take place in the parish church at ten, and after the ceremony, a most splendid breakfast table was to receive the bridesfolk and their friends in the dining-room. The drawing-room, with the choicest green-house flowers, blooming from every table, and from every stand, was to receive the guests as they arrived, and into this room the lovely bride had promised to enter in her bridal array, as soon as she should be informed that the whole company was assembled, and having there received the blushing honours which were sure to greet her, Lord Ripley was to lead her to his own carriage, in which she was to be conveyed for the last time as Amelia Thorwold. Alfred's new equipage sent down from London for the occasion, was to follow the procession unoccupied, the young man taking his place as heretofore with his father and mother, in the family carriage, and then, the hands of the happy lovers being united, they were on their return to head the procession together, their road being strewed with flowers by all the young girls

in the village, except Susan Jenkins and her sister Nancy.

In short, the programme of the whole ceremony was arranged with great care, and every thing promised fair to do honour to the Mount, and to the joyful occasion.

But it took some time to assemble all the company; the more distant neighbours arriving rather early, and the nearer ones rather late. Under such circumstances, the conversation of the first comers could hardly fail of being a little stiff and embarrassed, and as, for at least half an hour, it really consisted of little more than a repetition of the phrases "I really fear we are come too early," and, "I think I see another carriage coming," it may as well be left without further record, while we inquire a little after Lord William Hammond, and Mrs. Stedworth. The reader, however, may be assured that we will come back in time.

* * * * *

The fascinating nobleman of whom we have so long lost sight, continued to remain

in London, notwithstanding the lateness of the season. But for this there were two reasons. The first was, that he had not money enough to leave it ; and the second, that the illness of the respectable lady who afforded her protection to the youthful heiress, Miss Upton Savage, kept that splendid young lady in town, although she had taken a house at twenty-five guineas a week for the accommodation of herself and her friend at Brighton.

This enforced residence in an empty metropolis afforded, as Lord William Hammond was fully aware, the most favourable opportunity possible for atoning for all his former negligence towards the red-haired heiress ; and, as he confessed to his brother the duke, he was beginning to get so confoundedly tired of not knowing which way to turn in order to find a guinea, or get rid of a dun, that he was inclined to think he could not do better than put such opportunity to profit.

The obliging manner in which all his past sins were forgiven, and his present devotion

received, fully justified his Grace of Watertown in declaring, that his brother William *might* provide for himself, if he would.

But although the affair appeared to be going on as prosperously as possible, his lordship could not immediately reap any ready money profit by it, and he therefore found it extremely convenient to continue as a lodger and boarder in the house of Mrs. Stedworth. That estimable lady had indeed taken a great fancy to him, and, as they were sufficiently intimate to be quite confidential on some points, Mrs. Stedworth was quite aware that her noble friend had literally not wherewith to pay his washerwoman in ready money.

Now Mrs. Stedworth had of late years been exceedingly fortunate in all her pecuniary transactions, and had bought cheap and sold dear, to a much greater extent than any of her acquaintance were aware. A long lease of the house she lived in, and all its furniture, belonged to her, and she had, moreover, the sum of four thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. Mrs. Stedworth knew perfectly well that when a gentleman hap-

pens to be deeply in debt, without a shilling in his pocket, such aid as she was able to bring forward at a few hours' notice was not likely to be altogether despised, and being what she called "very much attached to Lord William," she flattered herself that this attachment being, as she could not doubt, reciprocal, she might be able to arrange an excursion with him to France, which she thought she might very probably make profitable by means of new connections, and which she felt quite sure could not fail to prove agreeable in the society of such an "admirable being" as his lordship.

It happened that she had pretty nearly brought this project to maturity, as far at least as she was herself concerned, for she had not yet named it to her intended companion, when the letter of Miss Thorwold reached her. It struck her that the state of affairs described by that young lady, though wearing a very favourable aspect to the fair creature herself, might, nevertheless, if the tittle tattle of Susan were persevered in, prove inconvenient to Lord William, as it

was hardly probable that all the world would listen with such perfect incredulity as the Dermont family had displayed. She determined, therefore, to put this letter in the van of her proposal to his lordship, thinking that at any rate it would make a very good opening for her proposal.

It has been said that the intimacy between Lord William Hammond and Mrs. Stedworth was quite confidential. Confidential it certainly was, but the quite was a word of doubtful propriety, inasmuch as both the lady and the gentleman had each of them one point, at least, upon which they were *not* "quite confidential." Lord William had never told Mrs. Stedworth that he was making "very fierce love" to Miss Upton Savage; and Mrs. Stedworth had never told Lord William that she had taken the trouble of going to church to hear his banns published, although at that time she had not the pleasure of any personal acquaintance with him; neither did she mention that, not contented with having had the honour of seeing the marriage ceremony performed, she had

since revisited the church and obtained an authenticated copy of that portion of the register which testified that the said ceremony had been duly and regularly celebrated. Nevertheless, Lord William Hammond and Mrs. Stedworth were very intimate, and very confidential friends, and they sat down tête-à-tête together to a late supper of oysters and porter, with a degree of familiarity which set all ceremony and distinction of rank at defiance.

“What should I do without you, my dear Stedy?” said his lordship, as soon as he had heard of the alarm occasioned by Miss Thorwold’s interview with Susan. “You keep me here, darling, as safely shut up as if I were in a fortress. I defy my creditors, and snap my fingers at the gossips. What a dear good creature you are ! I’ll be hanged if I know what I should do without you.”

“I have a plan in my head, my Lord William,” she replied, “that would serve you better than playing bo-peep in Half-Moon-street. Do not you think that a little excursion to Paris, in company with a friend

who dearly cares for you, and furnished with a thousand, or it may be two, of golden sovereigns, would be better for your health and spirits, than passing the autumn in London?"

"Yes, sooth, and troth, do I, Goody Stedworth," replied his lordship, laughing, "and if I had got you and your sovereigns there, if there was a gay cab to be had for love or money, I would show the Italian Boulevards how a handsome English woman could look, when perfectly well dressed, even if she were a little trifle passed sixteen. I'll be hanged if the thought does not make me feel like a school-boy talking of the holidays."

Delighted by the flattering compliment, and the perspective of pleasure which she had sketched for herself, and upon which her admired friend had thrown so bright an accidental light by his simile, Mrs. Stedworth took the liberty of snatching the hand of his lordship, which was at that moment gracefully supporting his aristocratic head, and suddenly imparting a kiss upon it, said:

"Speak but the word, Lord William, and the money shall be ready in three hours."

"Why, you dear, handsome, insinuating old witch," returned his lordship, with a smile which, to the eyes of his enamoured hostess, seemed to have some slight tincture of scorn in it; "what do you take me for? Do you really think and believe, my darling goody, that gentlemen of my station can indulge themselves so freely in gambols as a lady of yours? Why, I should have half the peerage sneering at me, as a pitiable sample of lordly weakness, and the other half gently hinting to their ladies, when they were making out their invitation lists next season, that Lord William must positively be scratched out, because he was too bad for any thing."

"Then you are determined not to go with me?" said Mrs. Stedworth, interrogatively.

"Yes, my charming creature, quite determined," he replied.

About ten minutes before these last definitive words were spoken, there might have

been found, perhaps, on the heart of Mrs. Stedworth, had it been carefully anatomised, a tolerably distinct impression of characters, forming the words "LADY WILLIAM HAMMOND." The fact with which she happened to be so particularly well acquainted, respecting the recent bestowal of that name upon another, in no degree lessened her inclination to bear it, *pro tempore*, amongst some of her former friends and acquaintance at Paris ; on the contrary, indeed, the perfect ease with which this circumstance would enable her to wear the title, knowing that she could throw it off the moment it became troublesome, greatly increased her wish to assume it. But the speech of his lordship not only completely effaced these characters, but scratched upon her susceptible heart the word VENGEANCE in the place of them.

Though his lordship did not see the lady's heart, he did her eyes, and read in them that he had vexed her a good deal ; whereupon, thinking that he knew her thoroughly, and that she was a woman of too much good sense and experience, not at once to feel the

force of the argument, he laid his hand upon her knee, and said:

“Goody Stedworth, you and I are no longer young enough to run our heads against stone walls, when we can find pillows of down ready at hand. Perhaps you have heard, my dear good woman, of the celebrated manufacturing heiress, Miss Upton Savage? Instead of having such eyes as yours, the light gray machinery by which she gazes on my attractive features, moves on swivels not quite at her own command; and her locks, as unlike as possible to these sable corkscrews, gleam with a red light that is terrific. Nevertheless, my excellent Mrs. Stedworth, I am going to marry her.”

Mrs. Stedworth looked steadily in his lordship's face for a moment, and he looked in hers. But her face, though the best worth looking at, was by far the least intelligible of the two. *She* saw that his lordship was quite in earnest, and had really opened his heart to her with the most perfect sincerity; but he did *not* see, that when she replied, “Going to be married to Miss Upton Sa-

vage! Are you indeed, my lord?"—her heart whispered aside to her own soul, "Going to be married to Miss Upton Savage! You think so do you?"

And thus this confidential interview ended more profitably to the lady than to the gentleman, for whereas she had got at his secret, and learned that he was making love to Miss Upton Savage, and intended to marry her, he had not got at hers, nor conceived the slightest suspicion that she knew as well as he did himself, that he had a lawful wife already.

CHAPTER XIII.

AND now we may return to the Mount, for the whole of the party invited to the wedding were assembled there very soon after we turned away from them. All were arrived save one ; Julia Drummond had during several weeks kept her mind steadfastly fixed in the resolution of being present at Alfred's marriage, convinced that she should suffer more from defending a refusal to do so, from the opposition it was sure to meet with, than could be produced by the act of making one in the crowd that would be present when the ceremony was performed.

But although every one else who had listened to the statement of Susan Jenkins en-

tirely and completely disbelieved it, Julia as entirely and completely did the contrary. She had tried, and tried in vain, to make Miss Verepoint and her mother feel that some further inquiry ought to be made, but they both laughed at her, and assured her that it required all the innocent credulity of seventeen to be taken in for a single instant by such outrageous absurdity. Julia therefore crept away to her own room, and wept in secret, never losing, however, to the very last the hope that Susan would keep her promise, and endeavour to persuade Alfred himself to take some measures for either proving or disproving the truth of her narrative. But when that *last* arrived, and brought no news from Susan, she began herself to be shaken in her faith of the poor girl's honesty, and to suspect that the years she had passed amidst the celebrated wickedness of the great city had really corrupted her old play-fellow. Nevertheless she felt such a degree of increased repugnance to the being present at the marriage ceremony, which far from decreasing as the time approached, became too powerful

for any arguments to conquer; she mistrusted her own resolution, and felt so strongly persuaded, that even if she forced herself to enter the church, she should infallibly run away when she saw the ceremony actually in progress, that she at length decided upon giving up the attempt. It was not necessary for her, poor girl, to feign any excuse for her absence, for having passed a totally sleepless night, she was too really ill in the morning to quit her bed, so having left her to the care of Sophy, Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter departed, and it must be confessed that, during the course of their short drive, they did acknowledge to each other that, dearly as they really loved Julia, they could not but fear that it was a too great affection for Alfred which had made her so anxious that the absurd story of Susan should be believed, and which now rendered her incapable of being present at his marriage. They greatly disliked the task of announcing her absence, but on this point they gave themselves more uneasiness than was necessary, for the intense interest which all the persons concerned took in the

business that was going forward, rendered it absolutely impossible for any of them to do more than exclaim, "Ill? really! how very unlucky!"

The complexion of Alfred himself, indeed, was a good deal heightened by the intelligence knowing so very well, as he did, the cause of it. And if a sigh, breathed very secretly, but from the bottom of his heart, could have cured her, poor Julia would have been no longer a sufferer.

But Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter were the last of the expected guests. Alfred looked round and saw that every thing was now ready for the entrée of his lovely bride. Was it possible at that moment that he could long think of any body else? It is, however, certain, that even at that moment there was a considerable degree of tender feeling at the bottom of his heart for Julia and for all her faults; but even this rather increased than diminished his passionate love for his beautiful Amelia, for did he not know that she was regarded with all the bitterness of jealousy for his sake? Yes, he did know it, and

for that reason he would love and cherish her more fondly still.

But why does she tarry? No, no, she tarries not! A slight murmur is heard from among the crowd of servants assembled in the hall. The drawing-room door has already been thrown open for her reception. Every eye is fixed upon it, and at length she appears.

With the slow and lingering step of a bashful bride, yet with the easy, graceful movement of assured beauty, Amelia Thorwold glided into the room, followed by two pretty bridesmaids, who were, however, as completely thrown into insignificant nothingness, by her transcendant loveliness, as the smallest little twinkler in the summer sky, by the presence of the blazing Jupiter.

Her dress, of rich white satin, fell around her in folds that Vandyke would have studied for hours; while floating over it, like the light vapour over the graceful fall of a full cataract, hung a three-fold tunic of silk gauze, that looked, as a sunbeam darted through its shining folds, like a delicate ema-

nation from the brilliant texture under it. On her head she wore a small, closely-woven wreath of orange blossoms mixed with the bright small leaves of the orange myrtle; and a costly veil of the finest Brussels lace, attached to the rich coronet of plaited hair, which finished her head-dress, fell over her whole person, her fair face alone excepted, which looked out from beneath the delicate cloud, like the beauteous star of evening at that soft season of the year when Venus rules, and when "lovers love the western star."

She certainly did look as beautiful as it was well possible for a woman to do, and as the exquisitely soft bloom which mantled her cheek, appeared rather like the blush of an angel, than a symptom of modesty in any thing earthly,—what if this bloom had been deposited on that exquisite cheek by the touch of her own skilful hand? What difference could that possibly make to any one who looked at her? None whatever. Mrs. Knight probably knew all about it, and my Lord Ripley also, but there was not the slightest danger that, upon this occasion, at

least, they would make any allusion to it. So there she stood, secure in conscious beauty, and, while every pulse was beating high with gratified vanity and triumphant pride, she cast her eye-beams upon the carpet, and seemed almost ready to sink after them, from the excess of her too sensitive delicacy!

It really was not without an effort that Alfred restrained himself from falling at her feet; but although his place was, at that moment of general salutation, rather in the back ground, he could not resist the impulse which led him for one impassioned moment to seize her hand, and press it to his lips.

But having thus far yielded to temptation, he fell back, and Amelia having meekly received the salutations of the company, accepted the offered arm of her uncle, and was led to the carriage which waited for her.

Colonel Dermont gave his arm to Mrs. Knight, who was to occupy the same carriage as Lord Ripley and his niece; Alfred was accompanied by his mother and the fair bridemaids; and the rest of the company having been disposed of, with more attention

to dispatch than ceremony—for every one felt that the lovely bride must not be kept waiting at the church, the good colonel having assiduously handed every body in the party to some carriage or other, found that the only person left as a companion to himself was a young legal gentleman, sent down by the solicitor who had prepared the settlements, in order to see them properly executed, and then to convey them to their proper strong box at Lord Ripley's solicitors in Lincoln's-inn.

The old gentleman was at that moment too gay and too happy to care a farthing who was to be his companion on the road, provided it was no one likely to delay him in his progress to the holy fane wherein he hoped to see the happiness of his darling son secured by the possession of the lovely creature who seemed by universal consent to be declared worthy even of the high honour of becoming his wife.

As Colonel Dermont crossed the hall with the last lady who remained to be handed to a carriage, he perceived that the newspapers

and letters, which were usually brought to the breakfast-table about this time, had been thrown, in the hurry of the hour, upon the hall table, and as he passed close beside it, he selected one addressed to himself. Having deposited the lady in the last carriage but one, and then followed the young lawyer into the last, he began to break the seal of his letter, but it was done with great indifference, for the hand was quite unknown to him; but yet feeling as if he had not much to say to his companion, he thought it would be a good excuse for being silent. Having, therefore, civilly said, "By your leave, sir," to the young lawyer, he deliberately put on his spectacles, and perused, as rapidly as his agitation would let him, the following letter:—

"To Colonel Dermont.

"Sir,

"I have been informed, on what I fear is extremely good authority, that your son and heir is about to marry—I would say is about to lead to the hymeneal altar, a young

lady, still calling herself Amelia Thorwold, but who, in fact, has no longer any right to that name, as on the thirtieth day of last August she was married by banns in the parish church of St. —, in the Borough, to the Right Honourable Lord William Hammond, second son to the late Duke of Watertown. That this lady will have rendered herself highly culpable in the eyes of yourself and family, by permitting herself to promise marriage to your son, after living with Lord William for several weeks as his wife, there can be no manner of doubt ; but I must do her the justice to say that she is at this moment labouring under the delusive persuasion that the ceremony which united her to Lord William Hammond was a fictitious one. The guilt of having thus deceived her must lie at his lordship's door, as may be easily shown, if her ladyship has preserved the letter which she received from Lord William at my house the day before she left London for your seat at Stoke, called the Mount. That her ladyship has been very far from conducting herself properly, I am quite ready to allow, and

I assure you, sir, that I am very sorry for it, because I have for years considered her as one of the handsomest and most intelligent young ladies of my acquaintance. It is, therefore, painful to me to feel myself called upon, as I certainly do, to prevent the unpleasant consequences which might accrue to all the parties concerned, were this illegal connexion to take place, by what must, I fear, lead to rather a public exposure of her improper behaviour in the business. I flatter myself, however, that she will derive a degree of satisfaction from knowing herself entitled to the name and rank of Lady William Hammond, and the position of sister-in-law to the very stylish Duke and Duchess of Watertown, which may, in part, compensate to her for the mortification of losing the esteem of your respectable family, and the handsome settlement which a marriage with your son would have ensured her. If she does not derive consolation from her name and title, I know not, indeed, where she is to look for it, for it is quite certain that a more contemptible animal than her

husband does not exist. I regret this exceedingly for her sake; but there is no help for it. There is one point, indeed, upon which she may take her stand in the attribute of a lady of honour, and perform thereby a highly moral action. Her very worthless husband, Lord William Hammond, is at this time, paying his addresses to the great city heiress Miss Upton Savage, and either is, or is likely to be, accepted by that cruelly deceived young lady. I would beg to submit to Lady William, to whom, before you part from her, you will, I hope, show this communication, that it is her bounden duty to announce to Miss Upton Savage, without delay, the fact of her perfidious lover's being already a married man. I have the pleasure of informing her ladyship also, that his grace the Duke of Watertown is still in London, and that it may be advisable also to announce the fact of her marriage, to him and his illustrious duchess, as speedily as possible.

“Should you, or your son, or Lady William herself, feel any doubt as to the authenticity

of this information, I beg to refer all or any of you, to the parish church of St. — aforesaid, and to the Reverend Samuel Birdaway, the Rector, who I myself heard publish the banns, and whom I myself saw and heard perform the marriage ceremony, to the record of which in the register I signed my name. I herewith annex a copy of the certificate of the marriage, which I subsequently obtained from the reverend gentleman, and beg to subscribe myself,

“Your obedient humble servant,

“CAROLINE STEDWORTH.

“Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly.

“P. S. I fear that the money obtained by the young lady from your son, for the payment of her various bills is lost to your family for ever.”

The first feeling demonstrated by Colonel Dermont, as he read this letter, was a sort of delirious wish to stop the carriage, and it was only his companion's polite eagerness to assist him which so far calmed his agitation,

and restored him to his senses, as to enable him to remember that there was no danger that the ceremony would begin before his arrival, and, moreover, that the quickest way of getting to the church would be suffering the horses to go on, instead of stopping them. But this restoration to common sense and presence of mind, very little mended his condition, which was, indeed, most truly pitiable. Notwithstanding his many substantial good qualities, Colonel Dermont was undeniably a very proud man, and to find himself, his lady, and their almost worshipped son, suddenly cast from the very highest pinnacle of popular admiration, and prosperous self-gratulation, into a situation so very deplorably the reverse, was a good deal more than his philosophy could stand.

Never before in the whole course of his very comfortable life, had the worthy colonel felt any movement of temper that might reasonably have been termed *furious*, but now he did. Alfred! *His* Alfred! SUCH an Alfred! That the abject victim of a dissolute lordling's infamous treachery should

have been congratulated by all the first families of the county, as the bride of his peerless son, and the future mistress of the Mount, was an idea that almost drove him mad, and he clenched his fists, ground his teeth, and rolled his eyes, in a style that very seriously alarmed his astonished companion.

Just at the moment when the paroxysm had reached its highest pitch, the line of carriages arrived at that part of the road which was most distinctly visible from the windows and lawn of Beech Hill.

“Do let us show them, that notwithstanding their abominable rudeness in not inviting us, we can be quite as gay as they are!” exclaimed the lively mistress of the mansion, as the first carriage appeared in sight.

“Heaven forbid we should not!” replied her sympathising husband, throwing up the sash, and laughing heartily.

“Yes, indeed! Heaven forbid we should not!” cried Mr. Macnab, suddenly seizing Miss Celestina Marsh in his powerful Scotch arms, and safely depositing her on the gravel walk before the window. Whereupon all

the company laughed as loudly and as perseveringly as Mrs. Stephens herself could desire.

And then one or two young officers jumped out of the window after Miss Celestina, and then the two Miss Murrays and Mr. Macnab did the same, every body laughing all the time most vociferously.

Whether these frolicsome sights and sounds were as distinctly heard and seen by the rest of the wedding party, as they were by the unfortunate Colonel Dermont, I know not ; but to him they appeared like the shouts and gambols of insulting merriment occasioned by the horrible position in which the Dermont family had placed themselves, by parading an infamous woman through the parish, and triumphantly declaring to all the world that they had selected her as a wife for their son !

As he raised his eyes in a perfect agony of rage to the shouting group, a sudden revulsion of feeling took place, and the sort of dignified contempt which the noisy vulgarity of the scene inspired, restored the well-bred old gentleman to his senses.

“But he is not married to her!” he said aloud, in a voice that expressed more of pleasure than of pain. “He is not married to her,” he repeated, with deep thankfulness; and all the horror, the exposure, the suffering, which must have ensued, had he not chanced to take up the tremendous letter as he passed through the hall, rushed so vividly upon his mind, that, instead of sorrow and anger, he felt nothing but thankfulness and joy. For one moment he sat with clasped hands and closed eyes, silently thanking Heaven for their deliverance, and then, having meditated for a moment, he said to his companion, “I beg your pardon, Mr. Lawrence, for having frightened you, as I am sure I must have done, by the violent emotion to which this letter has given rise. Read it, sir: the matter it contains is not of a nature to remain secret. Read it, Mr. Lawrence, and I think you will excuse my violence. A little reflection, however, has turned all my anger to thankfulness.”

The young man took the letter, and having perused it, said, “You have, indeed, reason to be thankful, Colonel Dermont; for

though the ceremony which has been so very near solemnization, could not have bound your son to this unprincipled young woman by any legal tie, the having to prove this publicly must have been a very disagreeable business."

"Doubtless, sir, doubtless," replied the colonel. "I feel that it is impossible to be too thankful for this timely letter, though it is impossible not to wish that it had been more timely still. I would to Heaven we had got it yesterday! But this is both ungrateful and idle. Will you, sir, give me the advantage of your advice as to the best mode of making this extraordinary discovery known to the party who are even now entering the church. It will be dreadful for my son—startling to our good clergyman—painful to every body! I even pity the wretched young woman herself—and her uncle, poor man! If he loves her, if he cares for her, as the child of his brother, and as bearing the name of his race, his situation must be terrible. For Heaven's

sake tell me, Mr. Lawrence, to whom had I better first address myself?"

Fortunately, Mr. Lawrence was a sensible cool-headed, gentlemanlike young man, who, seeing that there was no time to spare, for the first carriage had already drawn off to make way for the second, promptly replied,

"I think, sir, that in the first instance you should take Lord Ripley apart, and put the letter into his hands. I, if you will give me leave, will prevent the clergyman from placing himself at the altar, by telling him that a letter has reached you which must prevent the performance of the ceremony. To your son, sir, you will of course address yourself, if possible, in private—perhaps you can lead him to the church porch: and for the rest of the company—they will all become acquainted with the facts, somehow or other, in a wonderfully short space of time."

By the time the young man had ceased speaking, they had drawn sufficiently near the church for Colonel Dermont to follow this reasonable advice immediately. There

were still two more carriages to set down their company besides the one he occupied, but he called to the servant, who sat beside the coachman, and ordered him to let him out. This was instantly done, and Mr. Lawrence followed him.

Lord Ripley, his niece, and Mrs. Knight together with Mrs. Dermont, Alfred, the bridesmaids, and the clergyman, were already in the vestry, at the door of which the colonel paused, almost overpowered by the sight of his son, who, radiant with happiness, was already standing close beside his bride, seeming as if he had no eyes to see any thing else.

“Ask Lord Ripley to come out, Lawrence,” said the agitated colonel, making way for the young man to pass into the room.

His lordship immediately obeyed the summons, and with a smiling, lordly, full-dressed air, which seemed anticipating some little consultation on the etiquette of the ceremony, bowed his way past the group amidst which he stood, and left the vestry.

The colonel awaited him at no great dis-

tance, but it was out of sight of those whom he had left. He had placed his arm upon the font for support, and he had really need of it, for he was greatly agitated, but when Lord Ripley approached, he recovered himself sufficiently to make one step forward, and then put the terrible document into his lordship's hand, with more of dignity than embarrassment. Lord Ripley raised his eyebrows with a look of considerable astonishment at having such an employment offered him at such a moment.

"May I suggest, Colonel Dermont," said he, "that this, whatever it is, should be submitted to my attention after the ceremony? My niece and Mrs. Knight are standing in the vestry, and—"

"I beg your lordship's pardon," replied the colonel, rather drily, "but if your lordship will peruse that document, you will perceive that it had better be read *before* the ceremony."

The complexion of Lord Ripley was slightly heightened. The tone of Colonel Dermont startled him, and a vague misgiving that something was wrong, caused him

to turn his eyes upon the letter with more of haste, and less of elegance than he had yet displayed.

A very short space of time was now sufficient to cause the lips of the peer to tremble, and his whole aspect to change.

"This is an infamous libel, sir," he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with passion, of which it is probable that the colonel was not the real object. He played his part, however, extremely well, and looked as fiercely at Colonel Dermont as if quite determined to call him out.

"It is impossible, sir," he continued, "that you can really put any faith in such a vile and perfectly unsubstantiated statement as this, neither will I believe it possible for a moment that you can design to put such an affront upon my niece, as must be conceived to be intended, if you postpone the ceremony. Let me retain this letter, sir, which I will undertake to answer as it deserves, and let me request you to return to the outraged young lady in the vestry."

"As the letter is addressed to me, Lord

Ripley, I must request you to return it into my hands," replied the colonel, perfectly restored to composure by his lordship's blustering manner, "and I am now ready to return with you to the vestry." The bravado of Lord Ripley was not more sedative in its effect, than was now the composure of the colonel. "Give me leave, sir, to run my eye once more over this strange epistle," said his lordship, "and I will then restore it to you."

Colonel Dermont resumed his station near the font, and waited till every word of the letter had been re-perused.

"This paper asserts that my niece is Lady William Hammond, and sister-in-law to the Duke of Watertown," said Lord Ripley, returning the paper to the colonel; "and if this be so, it is quite impossible I can object to the connexion, which is decidedly one of the first in England. There must, I suspect, have been some lover's quarrel between Lord William and his lady, and probably this letter is written at the instigation of his lordship. But it is certainly rather a rough

mode of winning her back again. However, it is plain that all that Lady William's family can do, is to make the best of it; and I am sure that, in this, you must agree with me, Colonel Dermont?"

"Most decidedly, my lord," returned the colonel, with something a little like a smile; "and I wish you every success in so laudable an endeavour. It will be desirable, I think, that your lordship should announce the arrival of this intelligence to the Lady William Hammond, and I think I may venture to undertake the task of consoling my son."

There can be little doubt that the Lord Viscount Ripley would at that moment have found considerable relief, could he with safety have requested Colonel Dermont to betake himself to the regions below; but his heartless depravity had so thoroughly aroused the spirit of our worthy colonel, that the peer felt discretion to be decidedly the better part of valour, and he therefore bowed without making any reply, and walked gracefully away towards the vestry.

The time occupied by the reading and re-

reading of the letter, together with the short discussion which followed, was not long. Nevertheless, both Alfred and Mrs. Knight had begun to murmur at the delay. The clergyman, too, had disappeared, which Miss Thorwold observed to Mrs. Knight was excessively rude of him. But at length Lord Ripley and Colonel Dermont were seen through the vestry door returning together, or at least, if not exactly together, following each other very closely.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Alfred, "here they come at last."

His lordship entered first, and without appearing to see any other person present, walked up to Mrs. Knight, and offering his arm, said: "It is necessary I should speak to you for a few minutes, Mrs. Knight."

The lady was a little surprised, but she took the offered arm, and proposed to accompany him.

"I wish you to come with us, Amelia," added his lordship, but without offering her his other arm; upon which Alfred, who of course was standing close beside her, offered

his, which she took, saying to him in a whisper: "What is all this about, I wonder!"

At the door of the vestry, Lord Ripley looked round, and perceiving how his niece was accompanied, stopped for a moment, and said with very perfect *nonchalance*, "By your leave, Mr. Alfred Dermont, my niece must follow me alone."

Alfred stared at him with a degree of surprise that seemed to conquer every other feeling. But he obeyed, and tenderly pressing the hand he held, he suffered her to withdraw it, and pass without him through the vestry door, which Lord Ripley, first waving her forward, closed behind him.

"What is all this tedious delay for, my dear sir?" said Alfred, addressing his father. "I never was present at any other wedding, so I presume that every thing is in perfect form and order, but I had no idea that there were so many preliminaries necessary."

Colonel Dermont stood for a moment uncertain what to do or what to say. He dreaded the effect of the disclosure he had to make too much to wish that so many persons

should be present to witness it. Yet he could not leave the little room in order to lead his son into the church, without the risk of encountering the persons he was most anxious to avoid, now and for ever.

But the eye of Alfred was upon him, and though, when half a moment ago he inquired the cause of the delay, his fine countenance had displayed no symptom of serious uneasiness, a shade of anxiety was already settling upon it, which showed plainly that something must immediately be decided on. In short, there seemed to be no alternative; for, to follow Amelia was out of the question, and therefore, raising his voice so as at once to command the attention of every one present, he said, "Will you all, my kind friends, forgive a very painful necessity, which will soon be explained to you, will you forgive me if I entreat you to leave me alone with my son and his mother for a few moments?"

Whether they could forgive him or not, for a degree of mystery so exceedingly tormenting, mattered little. The wondering company, bridesmaids and all, were obliged to

submit, and in the next moment the young man stood alone between his father and mother.

“My dearest Alfred!” said the pitying father, remembering as by one effort of memory all the passionate love of which he had witnessed the display, “my dearest Alfred, you have a dreadful trial to bear. Let me implore you, for my sake and your mother’s, to bear up against it with courage and with moderation in your grief. Read this!”

The young man took the letter, and retired with it to the window, and, while his eyes eagerly devoured the contents, the colonel whispered in the ear of his terrified wife, “It is all true! The whole of poor Susan’s frightful story is true!” And these few words having been spoken, and heard, the father and mother stood side by side with their eyes fixed upon their adored son, and trembling, both of them, literally from head to foot, lest they should see him overwhelmed even to death by the fatal tidings.

Alfred read the letter to the end; he neither missed a single word of it, nor felt it

necessary to read a single word of it twice. Having finished, he folded it up deliberately and turning round his unblanched and unflushed cheek to his parents, walked quietly towards them, and restored the momentous document to his father's keeping. Their eyes were bent upon him as if they would have started from their sockets.

"Why do you both look at me with such fearful anxiety?" said he. "Is it possible that you can suppose I should feel any touch of sorrow, any particle of regret at being made acquainted with the disgusting facts communicated by that letter?"

The tone in which he spoke was so much less like that of an outraged, broken-hearted lover, than of a high-minded man, disdaining what is vile too sincerely to resent it, that his father, who had literally been afraid to look at him, lest his agony should be more vehemently impressed on his features than a father's heart could bear, now raised his eyes to his face with a feeling more akin to curiosity than to fear. And his eyes, once again fixed upon those speaking features,

continued to gaze as if they never intended to lose sight of them again. A new spirit, a new intelligence, a new era of existence, seemed to have come upon Alfred, and though the expression of his noble brow was severely grave, there was an expression of conscious power within himself, that gave more of triumph than of sorrow to his aspect.

“Alas ! alas ! my poor darling Alfred !” exclaimed his mother, who was engaged in wiping a very genuine shower of tears from her eyes, “how will he ever survive the loss of what he so doated upon ?”

“Alas ! and alas ! my darling mother !” repeated Alfred, “how vilely must I, through my whole life, have abused your fond indulgence ! How vilely must I have yielded myself to all the naughty wilfulness of a spoiled child, since all you know of me teaches you to believe that I am likely to die of grief for the loss of such a lady as this ! Oh ! mother ! dearest mother ! when, since the hour in which I first drew breath, have I ever had such cause to bless the merciful

Providence which has protected me at this moment ? Not only have I been saved from degrading your name by bestowing it, even for a week, a day, an hour, on this wretched woman, but I have learnt what she is, not by any lingering process, which might have made the conquering my degrading fondness a work of doubt, anxiety, and pain, but by a disclosure which must of necessity have obliterated every trace of affection at once ; unless, indeed, the quality of my mind were of the coarse texture of the clay which, having once received a stain, can never lose it. Were it so with me, dear mother, you might well weep, and cry ‘ Alas ! ’ But as it is, receive your son again ; and you, dear father, take me back again, a wiser and a better man than when, a few short months ago, your indulgence permitted my boy-like impetuosity to risk so desperate a stake for the possession of this unknown toy.”

And as he spoke, he extended a hand to each parent with an aspect so full of hope and thankfulness, that they must have been very resolutely determined to be miserable,

had not their fears and sorrows immediately been changed to rejoicing.

This short, but most satisfactory conclusion to the melo-dramatic performances of the morning having brought the principal performers into a very agreeable state of mind, they began to remember the awkward position of the assistants.

“Lose no time, my dear father, in making your farewell compliments to the friends so absurdly called together. I know of nothing that you can say to them, save so much of the truth as shall make them understand that the fair lady is claimed by another. However much the parties may deserve exposure, I would not wish that we should take the task of retribution on ourselves. The circumstances stated in this letter are, most of them, I fear, of a nature to become more than sufficiently public, without our assistance.”

“The precaution comes too late, Alfred,” replied his father. “I have already shown the precious scroll to Mr. Lawrence, and upon my word it never occurred to me to bind him to secrecy. And now then for this

strange sort of dismissal to our guests. Upon my word I feel very awkward about it. Those who are staying in the house must, I think, go back to the Mount for breakfast."

"Well, sir," said Alfred, smiling, "let them go back to the Mount to breakfast. Let the whole party do so. It would not be in good taste, I think, for me to display myself and my joyous feelings before them. Nor would it be well for me to do the honours of my bridal breakfast, when the bride has so decidedly given herself to another. But I see no reason why you and my mother should insist upon sending the company away starving."

"Upon my word, Alfred, I believe you are right," returned the hospitable old gentleman, greatly relieved by being reprieved from the necessity of telling his friends that they were all expected to take themselves off as fast as possible, and he was now departing with a step as quick as it had before been tardy, when Alfred laid a hand upon his arm to detain him. There was at that

moment more of agitation in the manner of the young man than he had yet displayed ; but, perhaps, because he was conscious of a rushing of blood to his face which made his ears tingle. He was employing his pocket-handkerchief in a manner that concealed the greater part of his countenance. "I wish, sir," said he, "you would tell Mrs. Verepoint that I should consider it as a very great act of kindness if she would go home directly, and take me with her. She will understand, I am sure, that it would be disagreeable for me to return to the Mount just now."

"Certainly, my dear fellow ; no doubt of it, no doubt of it," and, so saying, the colonel made his exit into the church, and found the whole party standing, with the clergyman in the midst of them, as completely in "amazement lost," as it was well possible for an intelligent set of ladies and gentlemen to be. Having expressed his hopes very cordially, that, notwithstanding the astounding occurrence which had so startled them all, the whole party would

assemble at the Mount, he took Mrs. Verepoint aside, and delivered Alfred's message to her.

"Of course, my dear colonel," replied the kind lady, "it is easy to imagine what his feelings must be; and I declare to you that I have been too much shocked myself, to feel at all disposed to join a large party. Poor, dear young man! What a pity it was that you would not listen with a little more patience to that good young woman!"

"No more of that, my dear lady, I entreat you! Trust me, I am heartily ashamed of myself, and shall probably for the rest of my life, believe every thing that a lady's maid says to me, let it be as improbable as it may. Alas! alas! How I did rate the poor girl. And every word she uttered, as true as the gospel all the time!"

* * * * *

The party returning to the Mount lost no time in replacing themselves in their respective carriages, and when they had fairly driven out of sight, the deserted bridegroom came forth from the vestry, and without

speaking a word to either, offered an arm to Mrs. Verepoint and to her daughter, and led them to their carriage which was now the only one of all the brilliant cortège which remained standing before the forsaken edifice.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALTHOUGH the feelings which Alfred had expressed at the first moment of hearing the intelligence which had so suddenly changed his destiny, were perfectly genuine, and as deeply seated in his heart for ever, as they were sincere at the moment he uttered them, it would have been difficult either for Mrs. Verepoint, or her daughter Charlotte, to have been persuaded when their drive with him was over, that he was really in the enjoyment of that perfectly resigned and well-contented state of mind, which had caused so much satisfaction to his parents. He had in truth never uttered a single syllable the whole way, and the first words he spoke after handing

them out were, "Will you have the kindness to tell Miss Drummond that I should be glad to speak to her?"

As it was very evident that the young man would be more at ease without their society than with it, the mother and daughter retired together, by no means displeased at being thus dismissed; for though neither of them were particularly addicted to gossip, they could not but feel a little impatient to communicate to Julia the wonderful events of the morning.

Glad indeed was Alfred to find himself at last alone. His thankfulness was genuine; nay, his perfect resignation to the event which called for this thankfulness, was genuine too; for the instant his truly high-toned and unsophisticated mind had been disenchanted, and the false colouring with which his senses had obscured his judgment removed, he felt that he had not loved Amelia Thorwold as he would wish to love his wife. It was not, therefore, in order to give way to any feelings on her account too strong to meet the public gaze, that

he so greatly rejoiced at finding himself alone; but it was that he might be at leisure to send back his memory over every word that had ever passed between himself and Julia on the subject of Miss Thorwold.

He wished for leisure and solitude to remember all this; but in wishing for it he wished rather for torture than pleasure. Oh! how he had treated that dear Julia! how he had dared to fancy that she loved him, and to attribute to jealousy every word, every look (and most involuntarily they had been many) by which she had betrayed a feeling of dislike to Amelia. Innocent Julia! Too pure, a million times too pure, to guess at the inward vileness, some incomprehensible emanation from which had caused the instinctive dislike which it was so evident she felt! And then came other thoughts. Was all that Amelia had said respecting her discovery of Julia's love for him a lie? It might be. Most probably it was. How could she know, or understand what passed in such a heart as Julia's? But then he recollected what his father had told him, of

her having refused to say that *she did not love the person to whom she had lent the money*; and as he remembered this, his eyes filled with tears, and his heart sunk within him, to think how very little he had deserved it. But his next thought dried his tears, by the burning blush it brought. He remembered the conversation he had overheard at the cottage of Jenkins, and the interpretation he had put upon it. Could Julia have hated and despised him for this interpretation as heartily as he hated and despised himself? Then came the recollection of her prompt unhesitating refusal of young Borrowdale; and, most unconsciously, he smiled as he thought of it. But with all this, whatever the reader may think of it, there was no idea, no notion, not the very slightest intention in the world of consoling himself for the baseness of his last love, by yielding to his inclination for a new one. Had any one accused him of this, he would have denied the charge with indignation, and have declared, with perfect sincerity, that Julia was much too angelic, both in purity of heart and supe-

riority of intellect, for him to dare to raise his thoughts to her. All the enjoyment, therefore, that he dreamed of tasting from the solitude which so delighted him, was from the uninterrupted power of thinking of Julia as she had been to him before his late bewildering fit of frenzy had taken possession of him; and all he had that moment hoped, or wished, was that she would be generous enough to restore him to that dear and precious niche in her young heart.

Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter, meanwhile, hastened to the apartment of Julia, where they found her engaged in sealing a letter. She felt, and looked, rather surprised at seeing them so soon returned, and coloured a little as she looked first at one and then at the other, expecting that she would begin to describe to her the splendid ceremonial of the day.

"Are you tolerably firm in the nerves, Julia," said Miss Verepoint, forestalling her mother, who was on the very verge of saying, "prepare yourself, my dear."

"Why do you ask me Charlotte?" returned

Julia, trying to force a smile. "I do not think you have any thing to tell me, likely to shake my nerves."

"I don't know that, my dear child," said Mrs. Verepoint; "your nerves must be stronger than mine, if they can stand the history we bring you, unmoved."

"What do you mean?" said Julia, changing colour in a manner that rather falsified her promise of composure; "has any thing happened about Susan?"

"About Susan?" repeated the old lady. "We have seen no more of Susan, poor girl; but this we have found out about her, Julia, that she by no means knew all of the story she undertook to tell."

"But is any of it proved?" cried Julia, with both hands pressed against her heart as if it were bursting.

"Yes, my dear," replied the quiet old lady, "it is all proved, and a great deal more."

"And Alfred?"

"Why, I think Alfred is as well as can be expected," said Charlotte.

"He is not married to her?" cried Julia,

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"He is not married to her?" cried Julia,

while her lips and cheeks became as pale as death, from the agony of the doubt which her words disclaimed.

“No, my dear, he is not married to her,” said Mrs. Verepoint, “so you need not look so terrified. In fact, at any rate, there was no danger of his being really married to her, because she is married already to another man. The whole business is one continued piece of iniquity. And then, fancy her having persuaded poor Alfred to pay her debts! There is a degree of depravity in the whole history that it is really painful to think of.”

All this was said to Julia, but it is doubtful whether Julia heard a word beyond the monosyllable “No!” which comprised for her at that moment, all the news worth hearing on earth.

“Well, but Julia has not yet had the message with which we came charged, mamma,” said Charlotte. “The bachelor bridegroom has come home with us, Julia, in order to avoid the rather queer style of congratulation which, perhaps, he expected at the Mount, where, as you know, there

was an immense gathering which could not be dispersed in a moment. Our message is from Alfred, my dear, who desired us to say that he very greatly wished to see you."

"Indeed I cannot see him," replied Julia eagerly, and with a very visible change of complexion. "I suppose," she added, more quietly, after the interval of a moment, "I suppose he may wish to say something to me—to make some apology, I mean, about poor Susan; and to tell you the truth, my dear Mrs. Verepoint, I would rather not talk about it—for I do not think she was well treated."

"But is that reason enough for your refusing to see an old friend?" said Charlotte, reproachfully; "and at such a moment too?"

"No, it is not!" replied the candid Julia, determined at once to conquer the weakness which made her shrink from the meeting; "indeed, I ought to see him," she added, "for I want to send a message to my guardian."

The three ladies immediately descended together, and found Alfred walking with long strides up and down the library, in a

self sufficiently intimate and at her ease with Alfred to permit her conversing with him freely on the extraordinary event of the morning, and the subject was persevered in with the less restraint from its being evident that the hero of the tale rather wished to pursue the subject than leave it. He expressed with so much ingenuous frankness his consciousness of the preposterous folly which had prevented his even wishing to look deeper than the fair surface, while his love-fit lasted, that it was impossible in listening to him not to sympathise with the ardent thankfulness for his escape, which every word expressed, and the manners both of Charlotte and her mother became far more intimately affectionate to him than they had ever been before, but not so Julia ; she listened in perfect silence, nor ever once permitted even her eyes to express any interest in what was passing. Both Mrs. Verepoint and Charlotte believed that, with more pertinacity of resentment than they thought natural to her, she was still thinking of the rough usage and unceremonious dismissal of her favourite Susan ; and

it appeared that Alfred thought so too, for after suffering pretty severely from her cold silence for a considerable time, he suddenly said, " I hope, my dear Julia, that your poor Susan will forgive our abominable behaviour to her, and that she will come back to you immediately. Do you think she can forgive us, Julia?"

" I do not believe she was ever angry with you, Alfred ; she is a good-hearted and intelligent girl, and is too grateful to your father and mother for all their kindness to her, to permit her being conscious of any feeling like resentment."

" And she will return to you immediately, will she not?" said he.

" I have no doubt of it," replied Julia, and then she relapsed again into silence.

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It is needless, and moreover much too late in the day, to enter at length upon all the gossiping of the neighbourhood, respecting the extraordinary discovery of Lady William Hammond's previous marriage ; for the only amusing part of such an investigation would be

found in noting the enlarged degree of charity inspired by the title and fashion of the penniless scoundrel who was the hero of the tale, and this the worldly-wise would take for granted without being told of it, and the unworldly-wise would never very clearly understand.

The house throughout the whole neighbourhood where the discussion of the affair first seemed to become wearisome, was the Mount. There might be many reasons for this, but one certainly was the occurrence of a circumstance, seemingly of but little importance, and moreover one that was not only very likely to happen, but one that it was exceedingly right and proper should happen.

This was the departure of Julia Drummond for Scotland within a very short time after the events above narrated. That she should visit her nearest surviving relative as soon as her majority gave her the means of doing so, if she liked it, was undoubtedly the most natural thing in the world, especially as the old lady had regularly repeated her

invitation that she should do so, ever since she had been informed that "Julia was grown quite into a great girl."

Nevertheless, Colonel Dermont and Mrs. Dermont, and Mr. Alfred Dermont, could not recover from their astonishment upon finding that the young lady had actually arranged every thing for the expedition, and that Mrs. M'Kensie had actually fixed the day for her arrival.

Colonel and Mrs. Dermont did not choose to say so, but in their hearts they thought Julia very ungrateful for even fancying that she could find any residence endurable after the Mount. And Alfred lost himself in conjecture as to the cause of her taking so extraordinary a resolution. It would not, perhaps, be very easy to say at what precise moment after his becoming aware that he was no longer an engaged man, Alfred had found in the very bottom of his heart a little hidden pearl of affection, which he thought might help to console him for the loss of the beautiful Amelia. Nor does it matter. The discovery *was* made; and the interval between his hope of becoming the husband of Amelia, and his hope of becoming the hus-

band of Julia, was not very long. Alfred, gentle reader, was not yet twenty-one; and herein must be found his excuse, if any be needed, for the rapidity with which one set of feelings was chased by another, under circumstances however, which, it is but fair to allow, might excuse a rather considerable change of feeling in any man.

In a word, he was neither puzzled nor perplexed for a moment as to the best means of consoling himself for what he had lost. But, on the other hand, he was greatly puzzled and perplexed to decide, to his own satisfaction how far Julia was likely to agree with him in opinion upon this subject. How far she loved him? Or, whether she loved him at all?

The lamentable blunder into which he had fallen in his interpretation of her conversation with Susan, had so severely shaken his faith in his own sagacity, that he dared no longer speculate with any confidence on many and many dear recollections that nestled round his heart; yet, after all the timidity he could muster, and all the schooling he could give himself, he was not in despair; and after he had endured the very dreary

blank which her absence made, for rather more than a month, he informed his father and mother, that, with their good leave, he intended to ask Julia Drummond if she would consent to forget the folly of his first choice, and console him for all its consequences by becoming his wife.

The time had been when both the colonel and his lady would have started in dismay at such a proposition. But somehow or other, they could hardly have explained the reason why, their ideas had altered a good deal. The process had been gradual, and each little step in it had been impelled by some little special cause. Julia had grown tall and handsome. Julia had refused the son, and probably the heir, of a peer. Julia was of age, and in possession of her little fortune. Julia had been right, about Susan, when they had been all wrong; and last, though by no means least, Julia had actually found means to withdraw herself from the matchless Mount, and to write word that she was very well, and happy, afterwards.

Thus, then, Julia Drummond was not quite the same Julia Drummond as formerly; moreover, young as she was, there was some-

thing about her character that offered so agreeable a contrast to the terrific matron that had crossed their path in the shape of a young lady of fashion, that the father looked at the mother, and the mother looked at the father, with a smile, as they listened to this new proposal from their son.

“ Well, my dear boy,” said the colonel, after remaining silent for about half a moment, as if he were doubtingly weighing his proposal, “ well, I do not see any great objection, I confess. What do you say, my dear ?”

“ Why, really, colonel, considering what we have seen of the conduct of beautiful young ladies of whom we did not know enough to judge thoroughly, I confess I am inclined to think that there would be more wisdom in Alfred’s marrying our own little Julia, than in urging him to set off upon any fresh chase after strangers.”

Thus sanctioned, Alfred, with a beating heart, sat down to tell the friend of his whole life, the dear companion, whose value he had only learnt since he had lost her, that if she only would consent to be his wife, he would consent to be her pupil for evermore, as he

had been in days of yore; and that if she would not grow weary of teaching, he should never grow weary of learning—in the hope that the time might come when, at last, he might be more worthy to approach her as an equal, than he could possibly be till she had consented to become his loved and lovely instructress, and his compassionate guardian angel through life. The letter was really a very charming letter, full of truth and feeling, and the reader should have it entire, had I a few more blank pages before me.

This letter reached its destination safely. It was the third which Julia had received from him since her arrival at Eagle's Cliff, and the two former ones had both been long letters, and very affectionate, though her reply to the first—the second she had not as yet replied to at all—was rather reserved, though kind, and by no means so long as his own.

Then why, when Julia opened this third letter, did she feel so very certain that it contained something more important than its predecessors? Was it because the lines were closer together? Or was it because he had

not waited for an answer to his last? Or was it because her eye instantly caught sight of the interjection "oh!" close to her own name? Whatever might be the cause, she felt that she could not read it in the presence of her pleasant, and quite wide-awake old aunt, and therefore she got up very quietly, and walked out of the room. She was quite out of breath when she got to her own chamber, but that might be because she had stepped up the stairs very rapidly. And having reached a charming, high-backed old chair, in which she had accustomed herself, since her residence at Eagle's Cliff, to take all her meditations, self-examinations, and such like exercises, she seated herself therein, and read the letter. Fast and full flowed her tears as she read on; and doubtless they were, in part, delicious tears, yet not so much so perhaps, as most people, had her heart been known to them, might have expected.

If Alfred had spent many hours of every day since they parted, in rehearsing to himself the various little passages of their past lives, in which Julia had shown symptoms of affection for him, so had Julia likewise. And Julia, being of the two the best in-

formed on the subject, had earliest and most decidedly come to the conviction that again, and again, and again, she had betrayed herself.

The consequence of this was that before she went to bed that night, she wrote a letter, not more than one-eighth part so long as his, in which she gently, gratefully, meekly, but most decidedly, declined his offered hand. Then, breathing one deep sigh, as she sealed her despatch, she exclaimed "No, my dearest Alfred! You shall not make shipwreck of your happiness a second time by mistaking your heart. You have found out, painfully enough, no doubt, that admiration is not love. Nor is pity either, Alfred. And that you would find out too, were I weak and wicked enough to listen to you."

* * * * *

The effect of this letter upon the unfortunate Alfred was really terrible. His pride, his self-esteem, his undoubting confidence in the affection of almost all who approached him, had all been trampled down to the very dust by his adventure with the worthless Amelia, but the image of the pure, the innocent, the high principled Julia Drum-

mond had almost at the very moment of the frightful discovery, risen before him like an angel of light, and on this dear image his mind had fixed itself with a confiding firmness which had at once removed all shadow of weakness from his feelings and from his conduct.

But what, and where was he now? Of all created beings he believed himself the most profoundly miserable, and truly there was much in his position to make him feel so. The ceaseless course of unlimited indulgence in which he had been trained, had ill prepared him for suffering of any kind, and even his very best qualities, his generous and confiding nature, and the warm affections of his heart, all tended to increase his suffering. Could he, as he laid down his aching head upon that fatal letter, have had the power, by a wish, of falling asleep upon it for ever, it is to be feared that he would have yielded to the temptation. If Julia had seen him at that moment, could she have seen him sinking from his high hopes, into the miserable weakness of despair, and beheld her own bright image fading from his mind, and leaving the dark chilling void of

hopelessness behind it, could she have forgiven herself?

For many hours Alfred hid himself from every eye, and then, his resolution being taken, he sought his parents, with Julia's letter open in his hand. The indignation, the astonishment with which it was read may easily be imagined. But Alfred suffered them not long to dwell upon it. His only wish now was to leave England, and of course their only wish was that he should do so, in the way most agreeable to himself. "Did he wish to go alone?"

"No. He wished that they should accompany him ; but on condition that the name of Julia Drummond should never be mentioned between them." It was no vindictive feeling, but quite the contrary, which dictated this condition. Alfred knew that the heart of Julia had been bruised in his presence by the insulting spirit of the hateful Amelia. He had seen it, and adored that Amelia still. Could she forgive this? He had dared to hope it, but now felt that it must be impossible ; and he would not again outrage her name by suffering it to be pronounced with resentment.

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For four long years the devoted parents, leaving their Mount, and their greatness, wandered with him over nearly the whole of Europe, and though he could not so far recover his tranquillity as to consent to return to a spot he so dreaded to see as the house where he and Julia had grown and lived together in such sweet union, the interval was not lost, or useless. He never conquered his regret, his remorse, for the folly that had lost her ; but neither did he let it so conquer him, as to destroy his energy and intelligence amidst scenes so well calculated to rouse all his highest faculties into action, as were many of those amidst which he lingered. At length the sudden death of one of the principal tenants upon Colonel Dermont's estate made his return to Stoke absolutely necessary, and when the choice of remaining abroad or returning to England was indulgently offered him, he consented to return — not, however, to the Mount—he had not yet sufficient courage for that, and his father readily consented that he should remain in London, while he and Mrs. Dermont, both longing to see the place as much as Alfred dreaded it, proceeded to Stoke without him.

* * * *

Meanwhile, Julia had found a maternal friend and a very tranquil home at Eagle's Cliff. She had found, too, a fine old library there, and the gay little girl was growing rapidly into the studious woman, when Mrs. M'Kensie's only daughter, who was married to a wealthy Scotch baronet, invited her to accompany their family to London, for a few weeks. Julia did not feel the temptation to be very strong, for she did not fancy that she should like London. But Mrs. M'Kensie very cordially approved of her daughter's proposal, and Julia, within a week after it was made, found herself the inmate of a very gay-looking house in Grosvenor-place.

Sir James and Lady Bruce had a large circle of acquaintance, and Julia was far from unamused at the variety of new scenes to which she was introduced. Ball followed ball in rapid succession; and Julia, though sometimes a little weary, yielded unresistingly to the wishes of her gay friend, and spent abundance of money in fine dresses, and abundance of nights with little sleep, without grumbling.

At last, however, a trouble came upon her, which made her look forward with a good deal of impatience to their return home. Julia, who had grown into very perfect loveliness, and who had speedily become one of the acknowledged beauties of the season, received an offer of marriage, which raised the triumph of her obliging friends to the very highest pitch; and so very determined were they that the foolish girl should not be permitted to mar her own fortune, that the more poor Julia persisted in assuring his lordship that she could not do herself the honour of accepting him, the more they privately assured him, contrariwise, that he must not suppose her refusal meant any thing beyond youthful shyness.

Lord Elton, though by no means deficient in intellect, on most occasions, was on this incapable of receiving the true answer, which drove him half mad, instead of the false one, which persuaded him to fancy that he was at the gates of Paradise. All this had gone on for a week or two, and Julia was beginning to feel vexed and angry, when matters were brought to a conclusion in the

following unexpected manner. Lord Elton, though not so much vexed as Julia, was beginning to think that the fair one, at whose feet he was willing to lay both his coronet and himself for ever, notwithstanding all her angelic attributes, was rather unfairly trifling with him, and he determined that his fate should be decided one way or the other, before a certain ball, where he knew he should meet her, should come to a close.

Having screwed his courage very firmly to this resolution, he stood ready, almost at the door, to receive her at her entrance, engaged her to dance, presented his arm, and led her, not to the dance, but to a small room prepared for chess and flirtation, at a very quiet distance from it. There was so much determination in the gentleman's manner of performing this manœuvre that it would not have been very easy to resist it, if she had wished to do so ; but she did not ; for she, too, thought it was quite time to convince his lordship that she was in earnest.

He had placed her on a sofa which occupied a recess in the wall, and seating himself in a chair opposite to her, he began in a manner equally earnest and respectful, to re-

peat the humble hope that time, and a conviction of his devoted love, might at length operate in his favour.

There was at first a sort of restless impatience in her eye, that seemed to express a wish that he should go on and finish, that she might answer him. But then, the eye became fixed, and there was a deep emotion, an anxious uncertainty, in its expression, which he could not comprehend, but felt convinced, at last, that at any rate it did not speak indifference. He pursued his theme, he conjured her to answer him. And then she started, and withdrawing her eyes from the object upon which they had been fixed, said,

“What have you been saying, sir?—I beg your pardon—my lord, I beg your pardon, but indeed, indeed, I know not a single word that you have spoken to me.”

Astonished and irritated beyond bearing, Lord Elton started up, following with his eyes the direction which hers had taken, and he certainly had reason to suspect that they had *not* been bent on vacancy, for on the opposite side of the small room stood a figure that might have fixed the eye of any lady in the world.

A young man considerably above the common height, with very strikingly handsome features, and a form of peculiar dignity and grace, stood leaning against the frame of the door which led from one of the larger apartments. A single glance sufficed to show that he was as completely engaged in gazing at Miss Drummond as it was possible Miss Drummond could be in gazing at him ; and there was something too in his attitude, and the expression of his countenance, which seemed to indicate as strong a degree of agitation on his part as the young lady had displayed on hers.

This indeed seemed to be the decisive moment ; at any rate it was plain that the agitated young nobleman intended to make it so, for with no other respect for the presence of this unwelcome intruder than the merely lowering his voice to something like a whisper, he said, " Julia ! Miss Drummond !" and then, in a lower voice still, he went on, " answer me, I conjure you ! I have placed my honour, my happiness, almost my life in your hands ; and, in return, I only ask to know your will. Julia, is there any hope for me ? Who is the man on whom you have

been looking so earnestly? Is he—tell me at once, Julia, is he nearer and dearer to you than I can ever be? Julia Drummond! tell me! May I ever hope that you will be my wife?”

“Never, never,” replied Julia, with a decisiveness of tone which if a positive and direct answer was all that he required, ought to have contented him, for it was impossible that any thing could be more positive and direct. It might certainly have been somewhat more courteous and more gentle, and so it doubtless would have been, had not Alfred Dermont (for it was no other), been standing (seen for the first time for more than four years) exactly opposite to her.

Lord Elton looked at her earnestly for a moment, and then, very boldly indifferent to the stranger's presence, seized her hand and kissed it.

“God bless you!” he exclaimed, and passed through a door which opened near the sofa, with a movement so rapid, that he had gone from her sight for ever, before her understanding had fully received the meaning of his solemn farewell.

“Julia!” exclaimed Alfred, springing for-

ward. "Julia Drummond!—so—so exquisitely—yet ever, ever the same! Who was that man, Julia?—who is he?—what is he?"

"It was Lord Elton," replied Julia, with unnatural quietness of manner; for her heart was beating like the paddles of a steam-boat that had some royal freight aboard, and being resolutely determined to get the better of it, she had rather overdone the business, and looked more like an alabaster statue than a living, loving, breathing woman.

"What right had he to call you Julia? What right had he to kiss your hand? What was it you told him could never, never be? Had he dared to speak of me? Did he dare to extract a promise from you concerning me?"

Alfred Dermont was vastly improved in many ways since they had parted last, but at that particular moment Julia had no great reason to believe that he had in any degree conquered his impetuosity, for not only did he speak with a vehemence that frightened her, but his eyes were turned towards the door by which the discarded nobleman had made his exit in a manner that strongly suggested the idea that he was going to follow him.

“He never mentioned you. He extracted no promise concerning you !” cried the terrified Julia, involuntarily stretching out her hand to check the anticipated movement, and laying it upon his arm.

“Nay, Julia,” said Alfred, in a softened voice, and gently, slowly, lingeringly removing the little hand that was meant to restrain him, “do not fancy that any force beyond the very slightest expression of your wishes can be necessary to prevent my asking these same questions too rudely of Lord Elton. I will never quarrel with any man whose safety is dear to you, Julia.”

“He never can be any thing to me,” cried Julia, with a little more of her statue-like composure, “and you heard me tell him so.”

“And you have told me the same, Julia,” returned Alfred in a tone of the most profound melancholy. “I hope, in common charity I hope, that he will not dwell for lingering years upon the words with the same ceaseless misery that I have done.”

Having said this, he dropped into the chair that Lord Elton had occupied, and neither of them uttered a word for what appeared to both to be an enormous interval ; but Julia very plainly heard the beating of her own

heart, and she was horribly afraid that he would hear it too.

“Julia!” he said, at length, “I firmly believed that I could never hope again; for more than four years I have believed the letter you wrote to me from Eagle’s Cliff had sealed my fate for ever; and what leads me to think otherwise at this moment? Who shall say? *I* cannot. I cannot even guess why it is that, in defiance of that letter, in defiance of your own assurance, so calmly, so deliberately given, I should be mad enough to risk the agony of another refusal. But were I to ask the same question of you that I presume that unhappy young man to have asked—if once more I were to ask you to be my wife, would you repeat your tremendous ‘Never! never?’”

The eyes of Julia were fixed upon the carpet; for Alfred spoke slowly, very slowly; and it would have been impossible for her to have remained looking at him all the time; but when he stopped, quite stopped, she raised her eyes, and though she met his, which were most intently fixed upon her, she very distinctly answered “No.” The word was not spoken loudly, quite the contrary indeed, but, probably from the circum-

stance of its standing alone, it was remarkably distinct.

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And this, gentle reader, is all the love-making between my hero and heroine with which I can favour you. Had Alfred been able to fall at her feet at the moment, I might have been tempted perhaps to tell you something about it, for that sort of thing is always very interesting ; but this was rendered quite impossible by the entrance of company. And when the first emotion of an author is over it is very difficult to rekindle it again on the same theme,—it is, however, so particularly easy to guess all that came afterwards, that there is but little reason to regret the interruption. Suffice it to say, that by the particular advice of Mrs. Dermont, given by letter, and of Lady Bruce, given by *vivâ voce*, Julia took advantage of the lucky circumstance of her being in London, to buy her wedding-clothes ; and that as soon as possible after her return to Eagle's Cliff, her marriage with Alfred was celebrated there, the colonel taking the long journey thither from the Mount, that he might satisfy his conscience, as he said, by performing the last office of a guardian in giving her away. The preparations for the

wedding were considerably shortened, by the marriage settlement prepared for the beautiful Amelia, serving as a corrected draft of that which was required on the present occasion.

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But the curtain cannot be dropped, without bringing, in the usual manner, the principal *dramatis personæ* for a few minutes upon the stage.

The Lord and Lady William Hammond, who were brought together for the space of several months by the spirited exertions of Lord Ripley, did not, upon the whole, enjoy a very prosperous career. They were divorced before the end of the second year of their union; but his lordship did not make so good a thing of it as he expected, for though the lover of his lady was a very wealthy personage, there were several circumstances brought forward on the trial, which tended to create a doubt whether the lady's husband had sustained much damage in the affair; and twenty pounds was all that he obtained by his successful action. Neither did this person think proper to marry the lady, and the later scenes of her career are buried in total darkness.

The acquaintance between Miss Celestina Marsh and Mr. Macnab increased so rapidly

during the breakfast-party at Beech Hill, that the gentleman having been told by some one or other, that Mr. Tremayne Marsh, was "certain not to marry," and very "likely not to live," proposed an elopement to Gretna Green by way of a frolic to the lady, to which she acceded in the most gay and good-humoured manner imaginable. It is an undoubted fact, certainly, that they were both of age; but for some reasons, best known to himself, the North Briton preferred bringing matters to a conclusion at once, and assuring his charming bride that he should look forward with the greatest pleasure to making the acquaintance of her brother hereafter, whisked her away first to Gretna Green and then to Australia.

As soon as the news reached her brother, he hastened to return, full of self-reproaches, for having neglected his duty, and determined upon making such a settlement upon his sister as should secure her from want—to which brotherly purpose he minutely dedicated one-half of his paternal inheritance. But the unfortunate Celestina did not live to profit by this kindness; for before the deeds were executed, news arrived of her having perished by shipwreck, together with her

husband, and many other passengers. Poor George looked as conscience-stricken and miserable as if he had contrived and executed the whole business. Every body was very kind to him, but the ladies at the Grange particularly so. Nevertheless, it was so evident to them that his spirits continued to be depressed, that Charlotte Verepoint became at length quite convinced that the only way effectually to repair the loss of his sister, was to give herself to him as a wife. And this she did, to the entire satisfaction of her mother, and by the harmony which has ever since existed between the well-restored and tastefully decorated Locklow Wood and the Grange, there is every reason to believe that all parties continue perfectly well satisfied with the match.

Mrs. Stephens is the mother of many charming young Stephenses, but is herself grown so fat and heavy, that she has quite abandoned the character of a young married woman. Mr. Stephens, on the contrary, is grown exceedingly cross, and exceedingly thin, and has been occupied incessantly during the last six months in labouring to coax his lady out of a sum of money sufficient to

enable him to pay a visit to his friends in the United States, that he might exert the energies of his own fine spirit, in examining the fine issues of theirs. But whether he will succeed or not, is still very doubtful.

THE END.









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